

The Lost Stories of Warwick Deeping

Volumes I-IX

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VOLUME VIII

THE LOST STORIES OF WARWICK DEEPING

BRIGHT STORIES FOR DULL MOMENTS.

A Night of Surprises.

By WARWICK DEEPING.

Jimmy London was in love. But that was only the beginning of the problem, for when a young man is a struggling journalist, and a sensible Scotch father refuses to let his girl marry until a young man can show something more solid than optimism or three pounds a week, love remains very much in the air.

Jimmy London had propped his bicycle against a field gate, and was sitting on the same gate, and looking across a field of ripening corn to where Waddon lay red in its green valley. Jimmy and his bicycle were taking their holiday together, ten days out of London once in the passing of a year.

To Jimmy London, sitting on a gate and watching the evening sunlight on the corn, came many thoughts and many questions. "Jean will be back in London next week." Jean was his girl away on a holiday in Scotland. I wonder when I shall be able to marry her? Old Macpherson is a bit of a dry stick. Suppose that if I were in his place and had a daughter like Jean I should stand out for certainties. That's a fact. But I wish a bit of luck would come my way—the chance to get into the editorial eye. "H'm! London, smart lad, got ahead of everybody else over that latest murder. Dashed fine bit of reporting, too. London's worth pushing."

So Jimmy dreamed until his watch and his hunger warned him that it was time for him to career down into Waddon, to bed and supper at the Black Bear. Moreover, he had his suitcase to send on by rail to Wickfield, his next resting-place during this holiday awhile.

Waddon was a sleepy town, and when London strolled to the station with his suitcase it seemed to him that nothing sensational could ever happen in such a place. There were no "headlines" to be got out of Waddon. Even the dog curled up by the station railings arose and scratched itself lazily as though it was an after-thought.

"You are just about a week late, old chap!" said London, smiling.

And then in the doorway of the booking office he came into sudden collision with a man who was rushing out, and the man's head bumped Jimmie's chin.

"Hullo!—I say!"

The porter hustled past him.

"Accident!—doctors!"

He began to run, and London turned and kept touch with him.

"Accident!—where?"

"Terrible smash at Bank Top. Scotch express. News just come through. Doctors!"

"How far's Bank Top?"

"'Bout three miles up the line. Lonely place. Terrible smash! Get help!"

In five minutes London was back at the Black Bear. He had forgotten his supper. He was thinking of nothing but the smashed express at Bank Top, and of his chance to work a coup. He would be the first journalist on the spot; he would get his stuff, dash back, reel off a vivid, flaming account of the accident, and wire it to the "Morning Mail." No, he would telephone to the sub-editor on duty. The "Morning Mail" would be the only paper to come out with a complete description of the accident, and he—Jimmy London—would have made his mark.

It began to grow dark as Jimmie pedalled hard in the direction of Bank Top. A motor car, driving furiously, passed him about two miles out of Waddon, and another followed it, and yet another. London scorching hard on the tail of the last car, and had it still in sight when he saw it turn to the right in the dusk and pass through a white gate into a lane. This lane crossed the main line by the bridge within a hundred yards of where the express lay wrecked.

London followed the car, which stopped and drew up beside the other cars in a meadow below the bridge. It was nearly dark now, and as Jimmie dismounted he saw two men climbing over the fence beside the railway line. The line ran in a deep cutting here, and as London placed his machine against the fence he became aware of a strange and ominous sound that sent a thrill through him.

He climbed the fence and stood poised there. He could distinguish a glare of light rising out of the darkness, and from this same pit of gloom came that terrible sound, or rather—medley of sounds—like the voices of the damned in agony. The railway cutting seemed to emit one long, unbroken moan, a ghastly undulating, above which rose an occasional agonised cry.

London felt a chill strike through him. He balanced himself on the rail fence, peering down into that pit of tragedy, trying to distinguish details, his head still full of the idea of "copy." He could see that something was burning, part of a coach, for timber and twisted ironwork seemed visible among the flames.

Leaping down, he worked his way along the fence to get nearer to the scene of the disaster. The journalist still dominated the man in him. He wanted to get a comprehensive picture of the smash before exploring for vivid details.

Suddenly he heard a voice, a man's voice. "Oh, for God's sake kill me! Will someone kill me!"

London drew back against the fence. That cry of desperate anguish and of appeal had shocked him so fiercely that he felt himself trembling. He ceased to observe and to think. He was conscious of nothing but an impulse, an impulse that drove him down into that pit of horror where men and women lay hurt and mangled. No doubt some of them were pinned down, crushed, trapped. He wanted to find that man who had cried out asking to be killed. Perhaps the man was caught in the wreckage. He had to be got at, helped, saved.

London plunged down the bank, and half-way down it he nearly collided with a figure that was struggling upwards with another figure in its arms.

"Sorry! Can I help?"

"For God's sake—yes, down there."

The man's face was all blood.

"No, not me; I'm all right. The wreckage is all right. People trapped. I'll come back."

London plunged on. And in a flash he became aware of everything—of the great, trailing bulk of the smashed train, of that overturned coach blazing next to the engine, of the cries, of the dim and moving figures, of other figures lying upon the grass of the embankment. A voice was calling for a lamp.

"Fetch the motor lamps. Why the devil didn't we think of it before!"

A man came running past London.

"An axe; isn't there an axe or a crowbar anywhere? My God—they're shut in."

A doctor was kneeling, examining a huddled figure by the light of an electric torch, and London became aware of other figures laid in a row beside the figure the doctor was examining. He saw someone handling a bandage. Some of the figures lay very still, others made restless movements, and a little moaning that swelled into a deep and plaintive murmur.

For a moment London felt dazed. The horror of the thing had bewildered him a little, and then he found himself following the man who had been crying out for an axe. Going towards the rear of the wrecked train, they met a party of men who had found the reserve tools in the guard's van.

"The second coach. There are people shut in there."

The second coach was lying across the rails, and half-tilted over on its side, and its first two compartments had been telescoped by the end of the coach in front of it. The fire had taken a fierce hold of the wreckage, and was spreading towards the second coach when the rescue party got to work on it.

Jimmie found himself standing on the footboard and trying to open a jammed door.

He shouted, and beat on it with his fist.

"Is anyone there?"

And a voice answered him, like a voice crying out in a dream.

"Oh, Jamie—Jamie! Oh, mother, my leg—my leg."

London nearly fell off the footboard, for the voice was the voice of Jean Macpherson, the girl whom he wanted to marry.

Next moment he was calling to her.

"Jean—Jean, is it you?"

"Jamie—!"

"Yes—I'm here. I'll get you out. Are you much hurt, dear?"

"How wonderful!" she cried—and then, "Oh, my leg, Jamie; it's caught under the seat. I can't move, and I'm all alone."

The window was up, and he tried to lower it from outside, while he hung to the sloping face of the coach; but though he fought furiously he could not move the window. Letting go, he dropped back upon the line, and began to grope about for some weapon, some heavy object. His fingers touched an iron fish-plate that had been torn from its sleeper, and, climbing back upon the footboard, he smashed the glass of the window.

"I'm coming, Jean; I'm coming to you."

The window frame was full of jagged pieces of glass, but London managed to insert an arm and get at the strap. The luck was with him, for the window slid down into the hollow of the door, the glass cutting the sleeve of his coat and wounding his arm. He did not feel it. He pulled himself through the window into the carriage.

"Where are you, dear?"

"Here, Jamie—on the floor."

He bent over her; he passed his hands gently over her body, and found that one foot was caught and held by the broken woodwork.

"O—Jamie—be careful—"

"Darling—we have got to get you out of this."

"Yes—yes, I'll be brave."

He leaned out of the window, and as he did so he realised the nearness of the fire. It was spreading rapidly to the second coach, and the glare and the heat of it were in his face. He had a moment of grim horror. He began to climb out of the window.

A NIGHT OF SURPRISES

(Continued.)

"I'll be back in a moment."
Close by he found a group of men lifting bodies out of a carriage. One of the men standing by had a crowbar in his hands.
"Quick—I want that bar."
He snatched at it—but the man resisted.
"Hold on, it's wanted."
"Man—I know that; I want it."
"All right; in a moment."
"I want it now. There's a girl in the carriage here with her foot caught under the seat. Come on."

The man turned quickly.
"Hurry up, lad; I'm with you. This bar is worth its weight in gold."
London scrambled back into the compartment where Jean lay helpless, and so strong was the glare of the burning wreckage that the carriage was lit up by it.

"O, Jamie, is the train on fire?"
"Don't you worry, dear; we are going to get you out."

He spoke confidently, but his heart was afraid. Supposing they found themselves unable to free her from the wreckage before the fire reached the coach and enveloped it? There were the doctors, and London had heard of a doctor having to amputate a limb in order to save a victim from such peril as that in which Jean lay.

He was leaning out of the window, and the man passed him the crowbar.

"I'd better come in and help."
"Yes. Mind your hands; the window is full of broken glass."

He helped to pull the man through the window, and then they got to work in the glowing glare and the increasing drift of the smoke. London thrust the bar under the edge of the seat, and tried to prize it up, only to find that he was not strong enough to move it.

"Give a hand."
"Both of them strained at the bar, bending together over Jean's body, and slowly the weight gave."

"Hold on. Don't let go."
"Yes, we shall have to hang on."
"Jean, can you move while we lift—?"

She raised herself on one elbow, and holding her breath, drew the crushed limb from the jaws of the trap. And then she cried out with the pain of it.

"Oh—Jamie—!"
"Thank God," he said.

The other man had withdrawn the crowbar, and was looking at Jean's twisted foot.

"Let's see if I can smash the door open. It would be better than lifting her through the window."

He was a stout fellow, and he did it, and springing down, turned to help London with the girl.

"Gently."
"How's that, dear?"

She managed to smile, a little, twisted smile.

"Oh—I can bear it. I'm one of the lucky ones."

So London carried her in his arms up the embankment well clear of the burning train, and kneeling, laid her gently on the grass. There were other figures here, and two busy doctors at work, and London went and stood by one of the doctors.

"When you have time—there is a girl here."

"Right. In a minute."

London sat on the grass beside Jean, holding her hand, while the doctor examined her injury. Jimmie had taken off his coat, folded it up, and placed it under her head. Her hand gripped his, and the pressure of his fingers comforted her, and helped her to bear the pain.

"The bones are broken. We shall have to splint them before we move you, young lady."

The doctor looked kindly into her face.
"Thank you. There must be people who want you more than I do, doctor. I shall be quite comfortable here."

"That's true," said the doctor; "I'll come back—if I may."

"Yes, please."
"I shan't forget. One doesn't forget pluck on a night like this."

Jimmie London sat beside her, holding her hand.

"Jean—how did you manage to be in this train? I thought you were not coming back till next week."

"Father wanted me to come home sooner."

"What for, dear?"
"I don't know. I don't think it is anything to worry about. But Jamie—"

"Yes."
"How did you happen to be here?"

"Just luck, dear. I was staying a night or two at Waddon. I never thought—"

And then the recollection of the great coup he had set out to make recurred to him, and he was about to tell Jean about it when he felt the pressure of her fingers.

"Jamie; I'm being selfish; go back and help."

He bent down and kissed her.
"What a great little woman you are," he said.

So London went down again into that pit of tragedy, and worked with other men in the glare and the smoke. The human pity of it absorbed him, and once again he forgot all about the "Morning Mail," and the headlines he had pictured, and the glory he would gain in the eyes of the great man in London. The self in him was lost in the suffering of others. He had Jean's face before him, a brave and radiant face urging him on. "Go and help. We—have been lucky."

Once or twice he went back to her, and about midnight he helped to carry her stretcher to the waiting ambulance car. They were taking her to the hospital at Waddon, and as he bent over her she spoke the same words:

"Go back and help, Jamie."

He kissed her.
"I'll be with you in the morning."

His heart was big in him, and Jimmie did one or two brave things that night, and in the doing of them got his right hand so badly burnt that the helper became one of those who needed succour. A doctor dressed the burned hand, and bound it up, and then looked with tired eyes into Jamie's tired eyes in the first greyness of the dawn.

"Where do you belong to?"
"I'm staying at Waddon."

The doctor patted his shoulder.
"I think you have done about enough. Go home and get some sleep."

The sun was rising when London rode slowly into Waddon, and asked someone whom he met to direct him to the hospital.

"Up behind the church."
"Thanks."

A sympathetic porter let him in, and went so far as to take him to the ward where Jean Macpherson lay. A nurse stood in the doorway.

"No; I'm sorry, but you can't come in."

Jimmie looked at her with his tired eyes.
"I won't stay; I won't be a bother; mayn't I just steal in and look at her—my sweet heart—I mean?"

The nurse relented.
"What name?"

"Miss Jean Macpherson."

"In the corner—there; for just one minute."

So London stood beside Jean's bed. She was asleep, but the nearness of her lover sent some message through the portal of sleep, for she opened her eyes and saw him.

"Jamie—!"
And what a Jamie it was—grimy, dirty, his eyebrows and hair singed, his right hand

swathed in bandages, and a kind of tired contentment in his eyes.

"Jamie, what's happened to you?"

"Nothing much. I got a bit scorched lugging a fellow out of a burning carriage."

"How splendid!" she said, and smiled at him.

He bent down and kissed her, and then he turned suddenly to the window, and stood looking down into the hospital garden. He knew that he had lost his great opportunity, and yet—that he had found something greater. It seemed to him that he had done things instead of meekly writing about them.

"Jamie," said her voice.

He turned to her bed.

"Yes, dear."

"Will you send a telegram to father?"

"Of course. He will be worried to death."

She put out a hand.

"But when he hears, Jamie, everything—I think he will feel—"

"You mean—?"

"Why, of course," she said; "he will help us all he can."

Wreck Not Goodwill.

O, better thoughts the wise beseech
Have spreading far and near;
Of earnestness and truth of speech,
That doth true peace endear;
Be it to urge how in the hearts,
Of those who hate instill;
All strife and ignorance departs,
To bless us with Goodwill.

Why haste new pleasures to secure,
Akin to that for wealth;
It brings not Thought that should endure,
Nor wins it golden health;
It soweth seeds of strife and stress,
The growth, alas, to fill;
The minds of men with naught to bless
The justice of Goodwill.

Ah! Will it never be again,
(Some say it was of old.)
"The simple life": how to abstain,
Mock glitterings to mould?
Not nursing envy, greed, and hate,
That bringeth more of ill;
Nor statesmen only reprobate,
Who plead for men's Goodwill.

There are some blatantly declare,
Fine promises galore;
What wealth is in this world to share,
(How so?) for evermore;
But staid Thought will ever show
The demagogues but kill;
The fairest fruit in life to know
That blossoms with Goodwill.

Shame be on all who now mislead
And tempt the more astray;
The idling minds who will not heed,
Life's evils of to-day;
Condemned, and damned, be noisv foes,
Who better thoughts would still;
And evil-doers all are those
Betraying men's Goodwill.

'Tis sin to gloat in speech that gilds,
But mad unrest's increase—
'Tis crime to hide the truth that builds
Faith's due concerted peace;
So those who will disseminate
Half truths with avid skill,
Give only furtherance to hate,
And hindrance to Goodwill.

—T.O.M. Blyth.

Then He Woke Up.

Old Bill was talking, as usual, for the edification of the company, and football experiences became the pet theme. "I shall never forget one final," said he. "We were drawn one all, with about a minute to go, when I got the ball. Off I went, passing man after man, till I got within range, and then I paused. I can hear the crowd shouting now, 'Shoot, man, shoot!' Drawing one foot well back, I let fly, and the yell that went up. Oh!—with a sigh of pain. 'Well, Bill, did you score?' asked one impatient listener. 'Score? Gad! it took the missus fully ten minutes to get the bed-rail from between my toes.'—C. Russ, Pelton.

Fog

Warwick Deeping

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Copy of Original Courtesy of
Sir Reginal Worthington

THE woman looked out the window. It was a queer little projection in glass and timber hanging high up on the cliff-face of the great old house and so placed that from it you could look both ways, along Sussex Terrace and Painswick Road. It was higher than the houses over the way, commanding them, and making it impossible for anyone in their upper windows to see into this particular room. In fact it hung there very much like a birdcage on a high house in Rome or Naples, save that it looked out over London and not at Vesuvius and the Blue Bay, or at the Alban Hills.

Anyone standing at the end of Sussex Terrace, which was a cul-de-sac, or at the top of Allardyce Road, could get a glancing glimpse of this window, and of a head and bust, or perhaps of two heads there. The bust was always in position, a pale profile, so lifelike that it puzzled many a passer-by. Sometimes it wore a bonnet, sometimes a lace cap, sometimes it wore nothing but a coal-black wig. It was utterly still and yet suggesting liveness. The other head that sometimes shared the window with it seemed just as still. In fact, it would not have been easy to decide whether a dead thing or a live thing was occupying that glass cage, and Mr. Josiah Wedgewood Clapp who lived at No.

2 Sussex Terrace was provoked to declare — “Dashed if I know sometimes which is which, whether it’s a woman there or a plaster cast.” Mr. Clapp was an observant person, as befitted an artist and a drawing-master. He had an eye for things, especially for artist’s models, mystery, and romance.

Both houses were a little mysterious, No. 1 Sussex Terrace, and that great Regency mansion, Rye House which cornered Sussex Terrace and the Painswick Road. To Rye House this particular window belonged, and yet, was so obviously an adjunct, that Mr. Clapp was intrigued by its history. It was not a new window, and yet a palpable excrescence, for Rye House was balanced and formal, with great flat white pilasters ending in Ionic volutes under the cornice which was pierced for the pillars of a balustrade. The sash windows were high and stately, and on the first floor a green balcony shaded a round-headed window with white tracery in the fan of the arch.

In summertime, Mr. Guy, who owned Rye House, might be seen sitting on the balcony, wearing a velvet cap with a gold tassel and smoking a meerschaum pipe. Mr. Guy was an eccentric, self-evidently so, to Sussex Terrace, just because he ignored the rest of the inhabitants. A man so

aloof and separative and superior could not be normal, for Sussex Terrace was sufficiently respectable and devout to have entertained the Deity to muffins and tea.

II

FOG. The woman in the bird-cage stood up and put her face close to the glass. No. 1 Sussex Terrace called it The Watchers Window. She looked down and along the Painswick Road and along Sussex Terrace, but on this October day the yellow fog curtained London with mystery. She could not see the pavements, only the dim outlines of the housetops across the way, shadowy chimneys, a collection of freakish pots, some tall, some short, some fitted with zinc elbows. The bare branches of the big plane tree in the back garden of No. 7 Painswick Road was just visible as a spiders web. Faint, circular blurs in the yellow vapour marked the street-lamps. To the woman at the window, London was muffled in silence. It was a ghost world, somehow fantastic, vaguely sinister. She frowned, and put a curved hand to her ear as though the shell would gather some sound from the outer world.

She heard footsteps, brisk, yet deliberate footsteps.

They passed along Sussex Terrace and died away. That would be that large person Mr. Clapp back from the city school where he good humouredly attempted with a shrug to inculcate the elements of perspective into un-interested small boys. She heard another sound, the cheerful clangour of a bell. The muffin man was on his rounds, basket on head, the muffins covered with a green baize cloth. The woman's husband liked muffins, lavishly buttered muffins, but when funds were short, the belly had to be chastened in the cause of the creative curiosity of man.

She was a little woman, pale, black of hair, rather thin of lip and sharp of nose. The casual world might think her hard, and hard she was until two particular people looked into her eyes. She had very beautiful eyes, brown velvet, of soft water that could fill suddenly with spicules of light. She wore a black satin bodice shaped to the figure but bulging out in quaint balloon sleeves. Her skirt was humped up by that strange Victorian contraption — a bustle, a sort of crescentic pillow which was tied on with tapes. An oval gold brooch set with an amethyst was fastened at her throat.

In fact there was something birdlike about John Hyde's

wife. She had the contours of a blackbird, and a voice that could be poignant and rich. Even her movements were birdlike, quick flirts of the head, swift and inquiring glances. She stood in her cage and listened, her head slightly on one side. The plaster cast, un-bonneted and uncapped today, stood beside her on its pedestal, and not unlike her in its clear sharp profile and its white hardness, but dead as to the eyes.

The bell of the muffin man passed along Sussex Terrace. There were pauses in the bell's clangour. Someone had run up the area steps and collected muffins for No. 2 or No. 4. John Hyde's wife listened, one hand resting upon a window-fillet, the other on the head of Cassandra, for that was the name by which the plaster lady had been christened in the home of the Hydes. Other sounds rose from the deeps of the great house, which had Sussex Terrace known it, was two houses. The plaintive notes of a violin made a little melancholy wailing. Old Mr. Guy was bowing at his Strad, caricaturing a Straus waltz, for Mr. Guy was a puckish person.

Yet another sound drifted to her, a man was whistling ; and her air of austerity suddenly was melted. It was cold on the upper floor of this great house, for coal — like

muffins — had to be eschewed or cherished. She smiled, and turning about, stood with a listening look upon her face. John was going down to warm himself, but John was warm within, and the work went well.

The Hyde tea-hour was at six, for it had to serve as the last meal of the day. Ann Hyde drew a little gold watch from the bosom of her dress. Half past four, and it was almost dark, with that fog blanketing the world. There was a lamp in the room, and slipping her watch back, she lit the lamp, keeping the wick turned low and raising it very gradually to warm the chimney. Glass chimneys cost money and were precious. Then, she drew a chair up beside the table upon which the lamp stood, and gathered a work-basket on to her lap. It was full of socks and odds and ends of wool, and needle-holders, packets of pins, reels of thread. A very Victorian figure, she sat and darned, resignedly, and perhaps contentedly, for her husband had gone whistling down the stairs.

III

THE boy loitered. A dreamy child, strapped schoolbooks under his arm, he wandered past shop windows, to stop

hesitate and stare into some particular window. He was of blue eyed, blond innocence, a child who had known neither fear or ugliness, and to whom even the Goswell Road was mysterious and enthralling. Yes, and especially so on such an evening as this, with fog making of this London street a world of phantasy. Great vans, lumbering over the cobbles, bore down on you like ships, dim and vast, with prow lights that were great blurred, yellow eyes. Shapes came out of the fog and vanished, faces, eyes, noses. Each lamp post was a little down-turned cone of light into which you walked and from which you vanished. Houses towered overhead and were lost in a greyish, dim obscurity. Shop-windows steamed. The wet pavements glistened. The fog was in your throat and in your eyes, and in your soul if it happened to be the imaginative, delighted, story-weaving spirit of a Georgie Gregson.

Fruit-shops with pomegranates, oranges and apples piled like huge jewels in a treasure house. Supposing they were precious stones ? Supposing Ali Baba had found them in sacks in some robbers cave ? Georgie had the Open Sesame of three pennies in his pocket, but pocket-money was being hoarded for other treasures that he coveted. A sweet-shop tempted him, for it contained fireworks and Guy Fawkes

day was near, bundles of Golden Rain, Squibs, Roman Candles, Chinese Crackers. His bright young face hung moonlike against the window. What a funny little shop it was ! He liked funny little shops. They were treasure-houses that accepted pennies.

But a month's pocket-money had been spent upon a store of fireworks that George was keeping to let off in Mr. Clapp's back garden on November 5th. Mr. Josiah Wedgewood Clapp was both brother and father to the young, a human and playful sort of elephant who trumpeted with joy and picked you up and threw you into the air and caught you again. G. G. liked Mr. Clapp very much indeed, Mrs. Clapp less so. Mrs. Clapp was small and plump and masterful, a suburban Victorian with protuberant blue eyes, a little bleak beak of a nose, and a great sense of discipline. Georgie Gregson boarded with the Clapps in Canonbury. A drawing-master's salary had to be supplemented somehow. Mr. Clapp dabbled in water colours, and sometimes sold one, but not at a fancy figure.

The boy left the sweets and the fireworks, and climbed the hill to the Angel, Islington. The world grew more spacious and mysterious here, and Upper Street became a large, fog-filled canal along which his blue eyes and

little freckled face floated. This was to be an Upper Street evening. Upper Street was stately and imperial, its pavements and roadway swelling and narrowing. Islington Green and its statue and Collins Music Hall were lost in the fog, but the Agricultural Hall loomed over the child like a palace of romance. Last year's Military Tournament had thrilled him. Mr. Clapp had taken him to see it. There had been Gatling guns, Norderfelt guns, real soldiers in red tunics and white helmets firing furiously at hoards of charging black-men. Hussars and Lancers had whacked pink and white paper plumes with swordsticks from each other's helmets. The Musical Ride ! George had shivered in his seat. He was militarily minded, a child of colour and romance who dreamed of leading cavalry charges, or of rescuing oppressed maidens. He collected lead soldiers, guns, ammunition wagons, tents, and sometimes Mr. Clapp played with him. They rolled marbles to and fro across a table, and in these battles the large man always allowed the boy to win.

Georgie Gregson neared the Highbury end of Upper Street, sometimes dodging people who loomed down on him out of the fog. The high broad pavement in front of the many windows of Rackstraw's & Robert's brought him to the shop

of secret desire. It was a toy-shop, not very large, but of superlative flavour. One window was feminine, the other male. Dolls and doll's clothes and toy prams and doll's houses, and sets of Liliputian furniture and hardware did not interest George at all. The other window was all soldiers. They stood or rode or drew cannon upon glass shelves. They reposed in boxes, white cardboard boxes, or red wooden boxes that held busbied and red tuniced grenadiers or silver cuirassed house-guards. There were brass cannon, a miniature fortress, a green stand covered with white bell tents. Here were Prussians in blue, Frenchmen in red trousers, green Russians, Chinese, Zulus, English infantry. The white boxes fascinated George, for here the little lead figures reposed in tiers, and you had to guess how many layers of them the box contained. Cavalrymen flashed their sabres, infantry charged with the bayonet. George was interested in a particular box, lancers in red, white and blue mounted on white horses. The price of the box was one shilling and sixpence. George had saved one and three pence. Next week the box might be his.

Yes, if nobody else bought it. Horrid thought ! He put his little freckled face close to the glass, and gazed at the

gay fellows on the white horses. What panoply, what colour, what a cachet they would add to his army ! But if someone bought the box before next week's threepence fell due !

George had an inspiration, and the courage of a great desire. A young woman was sitting behind the counter, a pretty young woman with a shawl round her neck and a most obvious cold in the head. George addressed her. He did not know how appealing his freckled face and blue eyes could be.

“ I want a box of soldiers.”

“ Yes, dear,” said the girl.

“ It's in the window, lancers. It's one and sixpence. I've got one and threepence ! I shall have another threepence next week.”

The girl blew her nose and smiled upon him.

“ I could keep it for you.”

“ Could you ? ”

“ I'll take it out of the window, if you'll show me.”

She went out into the street with George, and had the box pointed out to her.

“ Yes, I'll save it for you.”

George gazed gratefully and admiringly into her pretty

face. It was a pale moon face with dewy eyes, and they were all the more dewy because of her cold. But what did a cold matter, save when Conolly Minor sat next you and sniffed until you were moved to run a nib into his side.

“ Thank you ever so much.” said George.

“ Don’t mention it, dear.” said the girl.

“ Shall I leave you one and three pence ? ”

She laughed, sneezed, blew her nose, and feeling for her pocket, found what she wanted. She dodged back into the shop, and with a backward glance, beckoned to the boy.

“ You can have the box now. I’ll give you the extra threepence.”

George’s blue eyes opened very wide at her.

“ I say, that’s awfully good of you. But why should you ? ”

She was opening the glass door at the back of the display window, and she lifted out the box.

“ Because I like freckles.”

“ Have I got freckles ? ”

“ Yes, and such a big one right on your nose.”

George squinted down his nose.

“ Can’t see it.”

“ But I can.”

He was groping in his knickers’ pocket for the shilling

and three pennies. He brought them out. The girl spread a palm and he slid the money into it, and then gazed into her face.

“ I think you’re very pretty.”

“ Do you ? Well, that’s awfully nice, isn’t it ? I’d kiss you if I hadn’t got a cold.”

“ I don’t mind the cold,” said George, and he didn’t.

She wrapped up the box for him and saw him out into the fog. She told him to be careful, and not to get lost or run over, and George, feeling like a cavalryman, scorned both suggestions. Not till he had disappeared with his precious box did she discover that, in his excitement he had left his strap of books behind him on the counter. Well, well, well ! Had he been ten years older she might have flavoured his forgetfulness with a purposeful significance. A nice kid, and he had kissed her with enthusiasm, in spite of her cold. She patted her hair and glanced in the mirror that was let into the door at the back of the shop. Then, she unfastened the strap and opened one of the books, Pendelbury’s Arithmetic, and on the inside of the cover found his name recorded three times in a round, boyish hand — “ George Gregson - His Book. ” She smiled over it. So, there was security in recording your

name on the cover, and not on a flyleaf, which could be torn out by some purloining child who had lost his own copy or was sly as to stealing somebody else's. Perhaps, a more worldly friend had suggested the precaution to Master Innocence ? Well, he would know where to find his books, and she put them away under the counter.

IV

A HORSE-BUS passed, with lamps glaring, and George scampered across the road and took to Highbury Grove. He was quite unaware of his missing books ; the treasured box was the centre of this fog-filled world. He reached St. Mary's Road and turned up it, keeping close to the railings, and so, in a dream of prancing cavalry he came to Sussex Terrace, and two familiar steps and a familiar door. All steps and railings and doors were much alike in Sussex Terrace, especially so when fog made them as alike as peas in soup.

George turned the brass handle and went in. He was in a hurry to display his prize to Mr. Clapp ; also, he was hungry, and wondering whether there would be muffins for tea. The hall was like all other halls, and there stood the

familiar mahogany hat-stand. George did notice that the gas was rather dim, turned down to a tiny leaflet of a flame. Impulse was in the air. He made for the door on his right. Tea and muffins and his good master and playmate would all be toasting in front of the fire. George did not tarry to take off his cap and coat. He wanted to say "See what I've bought, sir." George was no oaf, nor did Mr. Clapp like oafs. The boy opened the door, and stood stock still, staring.

A man was sitting at a table fiddling with a brass thing that lay upon a sheet of paper. The man had fierce black eyebrows that met over his nose, and a head of insurgent hair that looked equally ferocious. Moreover, he was glaring at George with a kind of astonished ferocity. His right hand crumpled the paper over the brass thing with which he had been toying. Also, the room was strange, and so was the furniture. George gave a frightened gulp, and started to close the door.

The man appeared to jerk himself from his chair. His clenched fists pressed upon the table. His black brows bristled.

"Here, hold hard. Stay where you are."

George's eyelids flickered. He clutched his box.

“ I’m afraid I —— ”

“ Who are you ? ”

“ I’m afraid I’ve come into the wrong house.”

“ Indeed,” said the man, “ and where, if I may ask, is your proper house ? ”

“ No. 2 sir.”

“ This is No. 1.”

“ I’m very sorry,” stammered the boy, “ but, you see, I was in a hurry, and the fog —— ”

The ferocious glare went out of the man’s eyes. Yes, of course, he recognised the boy — Mr. Josiah Clapp’s small boarder. He smiled.

“ Oh, I see. That’s how it happened. And what have you got there ? ”

“ A box of soldiers.”

“ A bit excited about it, eh ? Well, you run along to the right house, and be more careful in future.”

“ Yes, sir, I will.”

And George fled, forgetting to close the sitting-room door, but pulling the front-door to after him with a bang.

The man gave a jerk of the shoulders. All sorts of things startled and irritated you when you knew that certain people might not stop at thuggery to rob you of an idea. He

uncovered the brass object which lay upon the table and regarded it almost with the eyes of a jealous lover. Then he went to the door, opened it, listened, looking up at the miserly gas-flame. The high and narrow hall was full of the fog. The incident had been quite innocent. Oh, certainly. He could remember as a small boy blundering into the wrong house at the Brighton front and getting half-way up the stairs before a naked statue of Venus on a landing had brought him to his senses.

He went and locked and bolted the front door. Then, he shouted up the stairs.

“Hallo, hallo, Mona Lisa.”

Almost it was a sailor's hail. His deep voice coming from a powerful torso, climbed and reverberated through the silent house. He had to shout again before he heard a door open, and a woman's voice come falling down the stairs.

“What's the matter, dear?”

“Was it you who left that front door unlocked?”

He heard a flutter of feet, and then a dim face looked over the landing rail.

“No. Was it unlocked?”

“Damnably so.”

“Oh, John, no one got in?”

“ Only a small boy with a box of soldiers. Clapp’s boarder. Mistook the house in the fog. Let me think.”

His wife came softly down the stairs.

“ I haven’t been out, dear.”

“ I have. Ye gods, what a fool ! I must have been the sinner.”

“ Dreaming, my dear,” said Ann gently, “ dreaming. I’ll make sure of it next time you go out. It must be nearly time for me to get our tea.”

Chapter 2

MR. JOSIAH WEDGEWOOD CLAPP was putting on his slippers in front of the fire, and Mrs. Clapp was taking the muffineer off the trivet when the front door bell rang. There was some agitation and breathlessness in its pealing, and Mrs. Clapp made a little clucking noise as she wiped the bottom of the muffineer with a plaid-patterned duster. Her husband's slippers were also plaid in pattern, and of a capacity that matched his person.

“That, I presume, will be Mr. George Gregson. Did you lock the door, my dear?”

“I did. That boy is late again. You are not sufficiently severe, Wedgewood.”

Mr. Clapp smiled. Had he ever asked himself why his wife was the kind of woman who called him Wedgewood instead of vulgarly and intimately Josh?

“I'll let him in. He's a nice child, Charlotte.”

“You spoil him.”

“Maybe I do, my dear. After all I am an expert in the matter of small boys. Nasty little creatures many of them. George is a gentleman.”

“I do wish Ellen would be more careful about the bottoms

of dishes and the muffineer. Please let the boy in, Wedgewood. We have waited fifteen minutes."

"I, too, was late, my dear. The fog, you know."

"That may be your privilege Wedgewood, but I think boys should be taught punctuality."

"Dreams, my dear, dreams. Time lapses when one dreams."

Mr. Clapp arose, and moved to the door. He was an immense man, pallid, big bellied, with a moon-face under black hair that seemed painted upon his scalp like the hair of a Dutch doll. He wore spectacles. All of him was round, his person, his wit, his temper, his jocosity, his paternal tolerant soul. His strength was colossal. It was said in the School that he could walk round the Common Room with a junior master under each arm.

Mr. Clapp unlocked and opened the front door to the fog and the rather scared little face of George Gregson. George was not a timid child, but he scuttled in past Mr. Clapp's large and reassuring tummy as though some evil thing has chased him through the fog. He held his precious box tightly against his chest.

Mr. Clapp, frowning and smiling together, observed him paternally.

"Something frightened you, George?"

" I got into the wrong house."

" Indeed ! Which house ? "

" Next door, sir."

" There are two next doors."

" No. 1. It must have been the soldiers."

" Ah, soldiers ! More of them ? "

" Yes, lancers, Mr. Clapp."

" And what frightened you in No. 1 ? "

" The man. He was sitting at a table. He had something like a brass pot on the table. He was very angry."

Mr. Clapp was interested, very much so.

" How inadvertent of you, George. I presume you trespassed upon the privacy of Mr. Hyde."

" Yes, sir. He has such black eyebrows."

" Bushed and baneful ! Come into tea. Muffins, George. And afterwards we will look at the soldiers."

Mr. Clapp closed the door, helped the boy off with his overcoat and hung it up on a peg. His immense hands made it look like a pigmy coat, but Mr. Clapp's hands, like many strong hands, were douche and gentle in their movements. George, with a sudden upward smile, deposited his parcel upon the lid of the hallstand brush and glove box, and Mr. Clapp smiled back at him, for there was a tacit conspiracy

between them. Mrs. Clapp did not approve of soldiers, lead or otherwise, and was always saying that George was growing too old for such toys. As for her husband, he appeared to grow down instead of up, and retain the playfulness of a St. Bernard puppy.

“ Golly ! ” said George, and then clapped a hand to his mouth, “ if I haven’t forgotten my books ! ”

Mr. Clapp wagged a finger at him, an admonitory finger. Had Charlotte heard the “ Golly ” ?

“ And where are the books reposing, George ? ”

George whispered.

“ I must have left them at the toy-shop.”

“ Then they will be safe.”

“ There’s a nice girl there. She gave me threepence and kissed me.”

“ Did she though,” said Mr. Clapp, “ I think I must go and purchase soldiers.”

The voice of Charlotte was heard in the house.

“ Wedgewood, what are you whispering out there for ? Do bring the boy in. The tea will be stewed.”

Mr. Clapp and George looked at each other. Mr. Clapp put a hand on the crown of George’s head and gently impelled him into the room where his wife sat like a little severe

black hen behind the tea-tray.

“ George wishes to apologise, my dear. George has had an adventure.”

Mr. Clapp pushed George into his place, and George sat on his hands, with his eyes on the muffineer.

Was there ink on his fingers ? Probably there was.

Mrs. Clapp lifted the tea-cosy. It was like a Napoleonic hat, black with yellow facings.

“ An adventure ? Little boys shouldn’t be late.”

“ Quite a surprising adventure,” said Mr. Clapp, reaching for the muffineer. “ Have some, George.”

George put out a hand, and saw ink on a first finger. Mrs. Clapp’s blue pebble eyes also observed it.

“ Inky fingers again, Master Gregson ! ”

George wriggled, but Mr. Clapp knew his lady. A red herring was trailed across that line of pursuit.

“ George has penetrated into No. 1, Charlotte.”

The lady’s nose peeked up like a beak.

“ What ? Into that house ? ”

“ Ask George, my dear. He mistook the door in the fog. Quite easy, you know, Charlotte. I’ve done it myself, Haven’t you ? ”

“ Never,” said his wife decisively, putting two lumps of

sugar into her husband's cup, but obviously exceedingly interested in George.

George had to describe his adventure, while enjoying a most succulent muffin, and prompted by Mr. Clapp. In fact, Mr. Clapp intervened here and there, and even winked at George, and insisted upon explaining to his wife that George had been late and hurrying in the fog, and so, in his haste, had chosen the wrong door. The incidents of the shop-girl and the forgotten books were deleted. And what had caused George to be late ? Mrs. Clapp insisted upon asking this question, even in the pursuit of possible scandal.

“ George lost his way in the fog, I think. Didn't you, George ? ”

George munched muffin and buttered mendacity. No wonder that Mr. Clapp was the most popular master in the school. He was so helpful and human, and could swipe a cricket-ball over the school wall, if he was lucky and happened to see it.

“ Yes, sir,” said George.

Mrs. Clapp sniffed.

“ So, you found yourself in No. 1, Master Gregson.”

Her blue pebble eyes were concentrated upon George.

Inky fingers ! Oh, bother inky fingers ! George told how he had blundered into the Hyde sitting-room.

“ But how could you ? ” said the lady, “ the hall must have been different.”

“ There was the same sort of hat-stand, and —— ”

Mrs. Clapp sniffed. Socially she could not allow herself to be bracketed with the Hyde household even in the matter of hat-stands.

“ Well, go on.”

George described the fierce man who was sitting at the table fiddling with some brass thing, and how the man with the black eyebrows had seemed about to jump at him like a savage dog. Mr. and Mrs. Clapp exchanged glances. Mrs. Clapp nodded her head as though declaring, “ I knew there was something funny about that house next door.” But, George, having no more to tell, was regarded critically, and informed that he had a buttery chin and should wipe it, and when George produced a very dirty handkerchief rolled into a ball, Mrs. Clapp clucked, and read him a little lecture on carelessness, slovenliness and soiled linen. Her husband was helping himself to plum cake, and cutting it with a dramatic dexterity. Possibly he remembered the occasion when he and a bright, blonde,

pretty girl had cut the bridal cake. Had he foreseen the future Charlotte, would he —— ? But such graceless thoughts should not enter a Victorian husband's head ! Get thee behind me, Satan !

Yet Mr. Clapp did wish that his wife had not modeled herself so admirably under the moral magnificence of the Widow of Windsor. Charlotte must vex her violet, Charlotte must reprove occasions, Charlotte must carry under her tight little bodice the sour milk of moral rectitude. There were times when Wedgewood wanted to get drunk, raise a belly shindey, dance, kiss somebody who hadn't a hard little nose. But what could you do ? Schoolmasters must be so respectable.

When tea was over Mrs. Clapp suggested to George that he should withdraw and concentrate upon his home-work. George hated home-work, but he did not demur. He was full of muffin and cakes, and there was that precious box to be opened secretly, and his gay fellows paraded. Moreover, he had no books. He glanced inquiringly at Mr. Clapp, and Mr. Clapp winked at him, and rose to collect a pipe.

" I will be with you presently, George, to hear you construe."

" Yes, sir." said George.

“ And remember to wash your fingers.” said the lady.

II

MR. CLAPP leaned back in his chair, and with the tobacco jar between his knees, fed tobacco into a curly pipe with huge, dexterous fingers. His wife sniffed, but the sniff was inaudible. She considered smoking a dirty habit, and some years ago she had proposed to cure her husband of it, but the reaction had been so unexpected and so violent that she had discovered that there were limits to a man's patience. Her large, easy going husband had flamed into sudden white wrath.

“ You want to interfere with everything, woman, but, damn it, I am going to smoke.” And smoke he did, while Charlotte, a little scared, had objected to his ungentlemanly language, but had realised that there was one subject upon which it was dangerous to cultivate too much virtue.

While Wedgewood puffed, she got her knitting out and began to click away beside the fire. Her tongue could be

active as her needles. If Wedgewood wanted to read the paper she would talk at him. Had not a wife the right to her husband's attention? But on this evening Mr. Clapp did not read the paper. He stared reflectively at the fire.

"Strange place, that house next door."

His wife's lips moved with her needles.

"More than strange, Wedgewood. Sinister, I call it. I'm perfectly sure that the Hyde man has a secret, an unpleasant secret."

"I wonder," said Josiah, "what the thing was George saw on the table."

"Something brass."

"H'm, yes."

"Do you know what I think, my dear?"

"What?"

"The man is a forger or something. Counterfeit coin. That might have been a mold."

"H'm yes." said Josiah, blowing smoke.

"A coin's mold would be brass, wouldn't it? And then, his anger, at being surprised. I am quite sure George is a truthful child."

"Oh, quite." said her husband quickly.

"And then, that window. The woman always sitting there."

I don't understand how they seem to use a window that should belong to Rye House."

" They may have rented the top floor."

Mrs. Clapp's needles clicked eloquently.

" And why ? Concealment. Something funny goes on up there. I think that poor silly old man ought to be warned."

" Which silly old man, my dear ? "

" Mr. Guy."

" I should like to remind you, Charlotte, that there is a law of libel."

His wife pursed up prim lips.

" I am perfectly well aware of that, Wedgewood, but sometimes one may conceive it to be one's duty."

" Dangerous, my dear. Infer as much as you like, but leave interference to the police."

" One might warn the police."

" And spoil a guessing-game. You know you enjoy it, Charlotte."

" How can you say such things ? What I often regret in you, Wedgewood, is an unseemly lack of seriousness."

Mr. Clapp chuckled, but silently so. Charlotte did not understand chuckles. She was so rarely amused. No doubt, her world was a dull world, but Josiah found a great deal

of fun in it, for the fun was there if you saw it. If No. 1 Sussex Terrace was engaged in some secret adventure, well, Mr. Clapp was not going to quarrel with them on that account. Life needed colour and movement, moments of piracy and of passion, occasions when you climbed walls and stole fruit, in the spirit, if not in the flesh. Charlotte made her world a pew and a prevention of this or that state, yet Charlotte delighted in beholding other people falling into sin. Charlotte was one of the world's million and un-self accused humbugs.

Mr. Clapp finished his pipe.

"I had better go and see how George is progressing with his homework."

"Don't knock your pipe out in the fender, Wedgewood."

"No, my dear, into the fire," and Mr. Clapp was moved to use a word beloved by vulgar and uneducated artisans. For, after all, man is man, and not a domesticated monkey.

III

GEORGIE GREGSON was busy in The Rookery. Mrs. Clapp called the little back room which jutted out into the garden The Study, but her husband had rechristened it in

more talkative terms. There had been times when the Clapps had taken four boys as boarders, but Charlotte had decided that she could not tolerate four irresponsible young savages in her house. George liked The Rookery. It was a retreat from Mrs. Clapp, even though it was associated with the loathsome ritual of home-work. Built over a scullery and wash-house, it rather suggested the poop of a ship, with its one big window looking out upon swaying elms. They were very black in winter, these elms, so were the hollies, and the sooty privet and the garden's high brick wall.

There were no rooks in these elms, but plenty of wind, and George liked to watch them against the clouds and sky, or the moon and the stars. Cats walked and made love and fought on the garden wall, unseemly beasts and a constant offence to Charlotte Clapp's pure spirit. The Rookery was full of books, shabby books, books on art and painting and adventure, and concealed behind the classics were a dozen or more yellow back novels. The room contained a deal table covered with a red cloth, four hard kitchen chairs, a very much worn carpet, and an oil stove. No doubt Mrs. Clapp was of the opinion that hard chairs were good both for small boy's bottoms and their attention to algebra and

literature. The Rookery did possess a fireplace, but the stumpy chimney was apt to smoke so noisomely that Mrs. Clapp had condemned it. The oil stove was something of a primitive, and elemental in its smells.

George had no books, so he could do no home-work. The opportunity was heaven sent. He had his gay lancers out upon the table, with Smith's Latin dictionary and one or two other volumes set up to screen them. Mrs. Clapp sometimes came and peered through the glass grill in the Rookery door. George had formed his cavalry in column, and then, as though to give the dramatic effect of a charge, he had broken up the column and put some of the troopers ahead of the others. He had some pictures of cavalry charges like that. The more bold and urgent could get ahead of the others.

George heard a tapping on the glass panel in the door, and swiftly hugged to himself a book, and pretended to be studying it, but it was Mr. Clapp and not his wife up there. The door opened, and someone whistled softly, *The British Grenadiers*. George swung round and saw Mr. Clapp with finger on lip. Mr. Clapp sidled into the room, closed the door softly, and looked over the top of Smith's Latin dictionary.

“ Ha ! The lancers charge. Toot-a-loo. What about prep., George ? ”

“ I haven't any books, sir.”

“ Splendid. Then, let's play soldiers. *Arma virumque cano*. Aren't they gorgeous fellows ? ”

Mr. Clapp sat down opposite George, and removed the barricade of books, for his presence was legalising the occasion. He suggested that George should have the whole army out, horse, foot, and artillery, and that the lancers should be paraded and introduced to their comrades. George kept his army in a tuck-box under his bed, and to collect it he would have to ascend the stairs and perhaps be waylaid by the lady. It was one of Mrs. Clapp's rules that the boy should not visit his bedroom between the house of eight a.m. and eight p.m.

Mr. Clapp divined the difficulty, and winked at George.

“ Clean handkerchief needed, I think, Master Gregson.”

George grinned and dashed off, to return safely with the pile of boxes, for Mrs. Clapp had fallen into a doze by the fire. Soon The Rookery table was covered with the panoply of war. Mr. Clapp asserted that the army should be formed into a hollow square, and the lower regiment paraded in the centre. They were busy on the business when Mrs. Clapp

woke up and came to the Rookery door. She looked through the glass panel and was shocked. She opened the door.

“ Wedgewood, surely you should be old enough to know better than to play at soldier.”

Mr. Clapp was equal to the occasion.

“ My dear, I don't think you appreciate the value of ocular demonstration in history. George and I are preparing to study the strategic moves in the battle of Waterloo. After that, we shall demonstrate the Battle of Cannae.”

Chapter 3

THE moderns would have described John Hyde as a realist. He had visions of a world that would be more interested in things than in theories, though the theories would remain for the elect, and help towards the production of things for the mere masses. John Hyde had no illusions about man. Plain man still was a very primitive creature, in spite of gas and steam and the Houses of Parliament — a primitive creature whose reactions were emotional and egoist. Vanity, greed, jealousy — Three Headed God of the millions ! Fail to sacrifice to this savage deity, and it would turn on you with a fickleness and an outraged self-love that were formidable. Demos had all the virtues save the one supreme virtue of impersonal reason and philosophic detachment.

The Hydes were at tea. It was no muffin tea, but bread with a scrape of butter. John took one lump of sugar, his wife none at all. Again, the moderns would have ascribed to Ann Hyde the qualities of maternal masochism. Horrible word ! Nor would it have been quite adequate or final. Human devotion, and courage, and steadfastness can be more prettily labelled.

Said the man to his wife, " Afraid we shall have to take Rachel away, and send her somewhere here."

Black-eyed Rachel, age twelve, and a more sensuous edition of her mother, was at a boarding-school at Hastings.

Ann Hyde did not question the suggestion. Half the term's fees were paid in advance, and the other half would not be forthcoming.

" I think I could manage."

" What, the fees ? "

" No, the other things."

" Yes, the child mustn't know. Too dangerous."

The man felt in a pocket of his shabby Norfolk jacket for his pipe. He did not look like a professional person, though he could trail half a dozen letters after his name. John Hyde was as fond of his pipe as was Josiah Wedgewood Clapp, but he could not afford to smoke more than four pipes in the day, and those four were cherished. Almost, it was a ritual. He carried his tobacco in a queer old brass snuffbox, and his long and restless fingers would pick out the brown threads and pack them carefully into the bowl. Ann kept a vase of spills on the mantle-piece for him in winter. There were maternal urges in her as she watched

the process, the filling and lighting, and the sucking lips that were like the lips of an infant sucking milk.

Assuagement came to men in strange ways. She would watch an expression of appeasement and of peace settle upon his dark and almost ravaged face.

He got up to collect a spill.

“ Can’t ask old Uncle James for any more. He’s carrying me as it is. I ought to hate him.”

His wife’s long lashes flickered.

“ Oh, no, not Uncle Jimmie.”

“ No, not Uncle Jimmie. Wicked old devil ! If we are to have our joke against society, he’ll enjoy it. Can’t you hear him chuckling ? ”

He stooped to light the spill at the fire, and held the flame to the tobacco. There was half a minute’s silence, till the pipe was drawing properly. Then he sat down, and sat down with gloating thoroughness, legs extended and crossed. He gazed at the fire.

“ Ever see pictures there ? ”

“ Often.”

“ The three Jews in the Fiery Furnace ! That’s us. Old Jimmie scraping at his bow and smirking. What do I do ? Scowl and curse. ‘ You wait, you fools ! Someday we’ll kick

the coals into your silly faces.' And you, Nan ? You stand there and suffer serenely, like a Madonna, with your hands crossed."

She smiled at him, but the smile was the smile of one denying a secret pain.

" No, I am not so good."

" I may differ. But, by god, my sweet, we're near the end. It is going to work. I've got Otto & Co. beaten all over the ropes. Let 'em prowl and spy. They won't catch us asleep."

He blew smoke and stared at the fire. There were times when his eyes seemed to show the red of the retinae. They were a visionary's eyes, yet fierce eyes, those of a hunting, questioning creature. Almost, Ann Hyde could feel the beat of his masterful and creative purpose. Sometimes it frightened her. This man of hers could do violent and ruthless things in the jungle-world of those who strove for power and mastery.

She understood him as no one else did, perhaps because she loved him, and her love was not blind. She understood him even better than did Mr. James Guy, that naught, mischievous old gentleman who liked to flout humanity, and who posed as a miser, and was not. She could divine her husband's moods, share in his frustrations, and his dreams.

Dreamer he might be, the creative child, full of surprises, a creature whom you could not take for granted. Never was she bored with him, as she would have been bored by a prosy, calculable conventionalist. Such women as Ann Hyde respond to colour and passion in a man, and forgive him much when he is winged Mercury.

Her husband stared at the fire. Presently, he sat up, and with elbows on knees, and pipe gripped between his strong teeth, began to talk. He could talk with his pipe in his mouth, and his jaw muscles were tense and hungry. He was in one of his futurist moods, a little fierce, a little scornful, allowing a prophetic exultation to deepen his voice, and she was content to listen.

“ Guess what I find to be the most astonishing thing in the world, Nan ? ”

He could keep her guessing, and she knew how to play to him by guessing and guessing wrong.

“ Poverty ? ”

“ No, my dear. One can cure poverty, but not the incurable crass conceit of the ordinary complacent owl. Stirs one to laughter and scorn.”

“ I would rather have laughter.”

“ You are so much kinder than I am. Just think ! All the

revelations have come to the world through the heads of a dozen or so geniuses, yet Fred, Gus & Syd are quite sure that they are cleverer fellows than their masters. Cattle ! For how many thousands of years would the average man have stodged along in the primaeval mud, had he not been lifted out of it by —— ”

He paused and gave her an ironic quirk, eyebrows up, eyes slanting and self-derisory.

“ Men like you, John ! ”

“ Precisely. We who create power. We who have the proceeds filched from us by the financial exploiters. We who are patronised by idiots who could not have invented so much as a safety match. When we get power —— ! ”

He pointed at the fire with the stem of his pipe, and his black hair seemed to stand up like the crest on a helmet.

“ That was power. Gas is power, in containers, and unfortunately in wind-bags. Electricity. But oil ! Oil is going to run the earth, Nan, oil by the million gallons. No one has quite got the medium yet, but no one is nearer to it than we are. And then —— ! ”

He gave an ironic toss of the head.

“ We'll be wonderful people ! Our triumphal chariot ! We'll drive over the prostrate bodies of a world of slaves.

And won't Uncle Jimmie enjoy the joke, chousing the exploiters ? The Hyde Internal Combustion Engine touring all over the world. You and I — luxury folk. Paris, Berlin, Rome, St. Petersburg, New York. Fated, my dear, and fawned on. Ye gods, won't it be funny ? ”

There were times when he was like a boastful boy, but more mature in his scorns and his laughter. He could be ruthless, but he was ruthless to himself and never to her. Nothing was good enough but the utter truth, so far as you had eyes to search for it and to behold it. She had known him do absurdly generous things. That he had a high, cold courage had been proved to her many times, both by his steadfastness in the face of frustration, and in the menace of those who were ready to steal the fruits of his labour. Had she not trudged with him in disguise along a German road, and been heartened by his grim, ironic smile during those last five minutes before officialdom had passed them safely and unwittingly into Holland ? Would she ever forget that night when he had come back to her with the air of a man who has met treachery and countered it, and she had discovered that long slit in the sleeve of his coat. “ Yes, Nan, a gentleman with a knife. He missed. I didn't. I left him in the gutter.”

Again, he was in a laughing mood.

“ And I left that door unlocked ! Afraid the poor child thought me an ogre. What if it had been one of Herr Bergman’s bullies, with a pistol in his pocket ? ”

She sat tense and still, as though confronting some peril, and denying its possibility.

“ Not in London, John.”

“ Not in London ! ”

“ They would not dare.”

“ Anything may happen in a great city, my sweet. Have the police caught Jack the Ripper ? Fog, a human ant heap. Yes, even in respectable Canonbury, with that dear hippo of a drawing-master living next door. How their tongues must wag ! ”

“ Perhaps not. In London, the greatest strangers are your next door neighbours.”

“ Perhaps you are right.”

“ Besides, they do not know.”

“ You mean Bergman & Co ? ”

She nodded.

“ How can they know ? We have left no trace.”

“ That’s true, but I wouldn’t mind betting you that there are dear Teutons in London to whom the discovery of our

whereabouts might be worth much money. He is beastly and implacably thorough, is old Fritz. Hence, our Bluebeard window. Do you grow weary of watching, Nan ? ”

“ Oh, no.”

“ You darn my socks and patch my pants, and keep guard over the child of our labours. Shall I forget it, even if I forget to lock doors ? ”

II

TO Georgie Gregson and Mr. James Guy, the world of London may have appeared equally mysterious and fantastic, save that they viewed it from different levels, the boy from a ground mist of fog and hansom cabs and strange adventurous streets, Mr. Guy from that altitude to which the old and the wise should attain. Mr. Guy was a little Puncinello of a man, high coloured, with an enormous Roman nose that separated two very bright black eyes. No eyes are black, but Mr. Guy's eyes had that appearance. In his youth he had displayed to the world a sleek, coal black head and a skin of peculiar freshness ; now, his hair fitted him like a snowy cap, but his skin was as fresh as ever. A vital person, Mr. Guy, with a humorous mouth, and a sharp

tongue that seemed to dart in and out like the tongue of a snake.

Mr. Guy had never failed to find in life both the pith and the phantasy, and now, in his most mischievous years, he was living his last adventure, and cherishing it as an experience, which, though partly vicarious, had the thrill of menace and of mystery. Mr. Guy's experiences had been multifarious, and spread all over the world, as a gold miner, lumberman, prospector. Always, his hands had served his head, and his eyes had seen things which less vital men had missed, and he had seen them a mile or ten years ahead of the average mortal. Now, in his last phase, Jimmie Guy was a very rich man with the reputation of being a miser, and chuckled over it, and enjoyed fooling the ingenious people who attempted to exploit him.

"Clumsy idiot. They bring the old gentleman a bunch of roses, and smirk and say "One must suck up to the old food, and exercise sentiment."

Mr. Guy was not vulnerable to that sort of thing.

He too was taking muffins. He sat in an armchair in front of a blazing fire, wearing his black velvet smoking-cap and wearing it jauntily. The yellow silk tassel hung down over one ear. Maria, his Italian woman, brought him

his tea. Maria the austere, with her grim mouth, and eyes that could hate. Mr. Guy put faith in a good hater.

“ Thank you, Maria.” said he, “ push the table a little nearer. No Tadeschi loitering about today, I hope ? ”

Maria adjusted the table. She was parsimonious in speech, like a peasant woman who is very poor, and pushes out the centesimi one by one and grudgingly.

“ None, signore.”

“ And no Fritzie stomachs and flat feet ? Not even a German band ? ”

Maria's thin lips seemed to compress themselves more firmly, and that was a negative.

“ Watch out for German bands, Maria. How is the fog ? ”

“ Like the English soup, signore.”

“ Faces floating on it like the peas. Has Mr. Hyde been up above ? ”

“ All day, till tea time.”

“ Indefatigable fellow. Turn down the gas, Maria. Dim religious light, what ! ”

Maria turned down the gas and left him to his tea and muffins, and the fire. A strange house this, but Maria understood its strangeness ; she could hate, and she was trusted. Also, Mr. Guy was no misanthrope to those who

served him. He had chuckled when he had shown her a copy of his will. "I pay you three hundred golden sovereigns a year, Maria, so long as you live, and when I die you will receive one hundred pounds. So it won't pay you to put poison in my soup." Maria had hissed like a snake. Poison an Englishman who had fought with Garibaldi. Not she ! If anyone was to be poisoned it would be some big, bland, bully of a German. Maria had good cause to hate anything that was Teuton.

Mr. Guy enjoyed his tea, filled a pipe, and smoked and meditated before the fire. So, John was very near the end of his labour, or thought so ? Well, well, well ! Ferocious fellow, John ! Proposing to turn the world upside down with a gush of oil to the head. What fun it would be financing the adventure, and chousing all those financial gentlemen who prospered upon buying up some poor devil's brains, and fobbing him off with sixpence, while they made millions ! Guy, Hyde & Co. Ltd. A nice little family company with all the shares in three holdings ! No, damn it, he would hand over a little packet of shares to Maria. Rather a good joke, that ! "Here's some waste paper, Maria. But put it in your tin trunk and keep it for five years."

The firelights glistened upon Mr. Guy's enormous nose

and upon his steel black eyes. He could sit very still, could this old gentleman, like some watchful falcon on a crag, but this stillness was elusive. The picking, pestering restlessness of old age would not be his.

This same stillness and its air of elusive lassitude had served him well on difficult occasions, fooling the other fellow into badinage or bluster, but Mr. Guy's stillness could be the velvet cloak concealing the sword.

He finished his pipe, and leaning forward, knocked it out gently on the high brass fender. The room was all brass and oak ; none of your flibberty-jibberty ormolu for Mr. James Guy. He had been toasting his feet on the fender, and he poked them into his slippers and got up. He looked even more like Puncinello when he stood, with his solid, rounded back and Pickwickian tummy. He should have worn tight knee breeches and white silk stockings, and buckles on his shoes.

Mr. Guy opened the door and slowly climbed the stairs. They were narrow stairs with a mahogany handrail, going up and up into the vastness and silence of the great house. A gas jet burned dimly on every landing, and Mr. Guy paused upon each landing, for he was both short of breath and of neck. His hand caressed the polished rail. By Gemini,

what fun it would have been sixty years ago to go tobogganing down that rail, taking the curves and defying the danger ! Danger ? Damn it, danger was the spice of living. Had he wished to, Mr. Guy could still have put a pistol bullet through a playing card at fifteen paces.

He reached the last landing under the glass dome of the stair well. There were three doors here, and Mr. Guy rapped with his knuckles on the one fronting the stairs. He gave three short rat-tats and then a more deliberate and emphatic knock.

Someone came to the other side of the door.

“ Hallo. What says Sinbad ? ”

“ Open Sesame.”

A key turned in a lock ; bolts were withdrawn.

Chapter 4

GEORGE breakfasted on porridge, two sardines, and bread and butter. Mr. Clapp also ate porridge, and a large plate of bacon and eggs, but invariably he was late, and George and Mrs. Clapp began breakfast together, but before the meal Mrs. Clapp held a cleanliness parade. George had to stand in the window and show neck, collar, teeth and hands. Mr. Clapp was careless about these matters, his wife not at all so, and though George resented the inspection he was compelled to conform. He did not like Mrs. Clapp ; to him she smelt vaguely of vinegar. Essentially he was a clean child, far cleaner in the prudish sense than the lady, who suffered from various congestions, physical and otherwise. In winter she was bothered with chilblains, and before sitting down to breakfast she would rub them with some lotion whose smell roused in the fastidious and sensitive child a mild feeling of nausea. George often wondered how Mr. Clapp managed to marry the lady.

It was a walk of two miles to the city school, and since Mr. Clapp's legs were long, and George's short, the boy left the house before the master. He had explored a series of short cuts, for going to school was not like returning from

it, escape, a dreamy ramble. The boring business of the day lay before Georgie Gregson ; the school bored him badly.

There had been two days of fog, but now the sun was shining. George had recovered his schoolbooks from the toyshop, where the pretty girl's cold had grown much worse. She was coughing as well as sneezing, and was wearing woollen gloves and a pink shawl. " I won't kiss you dis borning, dear," which George thought a pity, for he was incurably romantic, and would remain so, one of those creatures who see the heart of the rose, and not the ordure at the root of fertility. The wise and the cynical may argue forever upon the virtues of those who are blessed with the capacity for sensing beauty and those whose noses poke naturally into filth, but George came from a happy home, and had begun life by believing in things and in people. An only child he might be, but the Victorians were less spoil-mongering than the moderns, and in George the domestic Decalogue developed into a scheme of living. He was not to lie or be dirty, or greedy, or bang doors and shout, and fly into tantrums when his young ego was thwarted. George adored his father, and on the rare occasions when that beloved hero caned him, George was sure of the justice of the act, and felt a kind of pride in

his father's perspicacity.

George liked everyman, and was apt to imagine him to be rather wonderful. He did not think other small boys quite so wonderful, with special exceptions. He looked with awe upon the big fellows who were capped for the school's first fifteen. His own small game was cricket. Had not his father taught him in the Royal Terrace back garden to hold a straight bat, and stand up to bouncers and leg-breaks. Oh, no, you should not funk the bowling, even when a truculent lout bumped them at you and wanted to see you flinch.

George took the Canonbury Road, Ansteys Row, the Essex Road, and then a series of shabby streets that brought him across the City Road and into the Goswell Road. George had come to know by sight quite a number of people who were active during his journey to school. There was the meat-faced butcher in the Essex Road who hacked up joints on a great wooden block, and the old fat Italian in the bread and cake shop at the corner, a melancholy person who looked almost as yellow as the great caraffes full of lemonade in the window. Stale cakes were displayed here on a tray, at half price, and sometimes George fell for them. There was the hairy old man who swept a crossing in

the City Road, a very dirty old man in a huge billycock hat, whose trousers looked as though they were about to slip down his skinny legs. There was the young woman whom he passed daily in Fennel Street, a young woman with a pale face and speedwell blue eyes which stared straight ahead and seemed to see nothing. George wished that she would smile at him, but she never did.

There were other walkers who went upon their daily labours in the same direction as George, fat Mr. Brommet in black overcoat and top-hat, who was something in the city, and who walked to it, instead of bussing, for the chastening of his tummy. There were the Yarbury boys who boarded with the Rev. Mr. Skinner in Highbury Grove, two hard-bitten and sadistic young louts from Yorkshire who bullied anything that it was possible to bully. George avoided the Yarbury lads ; for even the younger of the two was too old and raw-boned and rough for Georgie to tackle. There was Miss Prinsip, somebody's secretary, pinched and precise and teetering along with her bustle wagging. Miss Prinsip sometimes spoke to George. She thought that he had such a sweet, Lord Fauntleroy little face. She would have been shocked if she had known that George had christened her Timber Toes. There were various other pilgrims, all

bent upon earning a living, or learning something that would be necessary to that state.

George was in that happy phase when economics have not eclipsed the sheer sunlit joy of living. Sometimes he and Mr. Clapp walked together like Peace & Plenty, or the Child & Behemoth, Mr. Clapp carelessly swinging a stick or umbrella, and sometimes hitting people with it. Mr. Clapp would apologise with impressiveness and gusto.

“ Please pardon me ; so absent minded, you know.”

Nor was the apology always accepted.

“ Absent minded be blowed, gov’nor. What price my hat ? ”

Mr. Clapp had had to pay for the hat.

He walked and talked with great bravura. Every part of him seemed to walk, his huge legs, his rolling shoulders. He was full of a debonair playfulness. He observed, he talked, he criticised. He set problems to George. George was to be a doctor, was he ? Very well then, what about observation ? Could George pass a shop window and then say what he had seen in it ? What was the significance of the aspidestra in contemporary art ? How many vans passed you while you were walking down the Goswell Road ? How many lampposts were there between The Angel and Highbury Corner ? Where did oranges and pomegranates grow ? Why

did Christopher Wren build so many churches ? Mr. Clapp may have been hearty and a little histrionic in his fooling, but he did somehow persuade the boy to notice things, and to envisage them, without just staring like a lout at a wench, and George's noticing of things, even in its innocence, was to prove of more significance than he knew.

It was on a frosty morning in November that George first became aware of a new wayfarer on the road to the city. George had taken cover behind the pillar-box at the corner of Ellgood Crescent to let the Yarbury boys pass. His dignity resented being taken by the ear or kicked playfully in the pants, and the Yarbury playfulness was rough and hurtful. George hated those two lads with their big noses and harsh blue eyes, and their red knuckled paws that smacked you across the mouth, but George did not sneak to Mr. Clapp. He just waited to let the barbarians go by, and while waiting he heard footsteps coming to Ellgood Terrace, and turning to look, saw a very tall and fair young man marching along, head up, shoulders squared. He wore a funny hat, and a kind of blue reefer coat, and trousers that seemed to fit tight to his legs. They were long and muscular legs, and suggested a jack-boot. George

looked at the stranger and the stranger looked at him.

The young man smiled. He had very strong white teeth, and two of them showed like fangs. George was puzzled by the stranger. Smile and teeth were not quite in harmony.

“ Good morning,” said the young man, “ you, to school go, leetle boy ? ”

George returned the good morning, though he did not like being called a little boy. And why did the stranger speak the English language so queerly ?

“ Yes, I am going to school.”

The tall young man stood over him, and assumed a big brother air.

“ Let us together walk. You by the City Road go ? ”

“ Across it.” said George.

“ Goot.”

They crossed the Canonbury Road together, George's legs going like the minute hand of a watch to the young man's hour hand, and turned into Anstey's Row, but in Anstey's Row something had caused the Yarbury lads to loiter — a dead cat floating in the water of the New River. They sighted George and his companion, and waited for him.

“ Come here, young Gregson.”

George managed to smile at them, and was for walking on,

but the elder of the two send out a lunging arm and caught him deftly by the ear.

“ No manners, you young cub. When a gentleman tells you to stop, you stop.”

“ You’re not a gentleman.” said George, boldly, and then the Yarbury lout rapped him across the mouth with hard red knuckles.

“ Snivel, you little beast.”

The intervention was sudden and forceful. The tall young man who had stood watching the affair, stepped in, and catching the elder Yarbury by the ear, smote him across the mouth just as he had smitten George, and much more fiercely so. The elder Yarbury snarled, swung a kicking foot and missed, and was tumbled against the railings.

“ Swinehund.” said the German.

Young Yarbury showed his yellow teeth.

“ Here, I’ll tell the police.”

The young man smiled at him contemptuously.

“ Big boy hit leettle boy. That brave is you again not it do, or I bring my little cane.”

“ Speak English.” snarled the lout.

“ I it learn, but you manners, no. Goot morning.”

He and George passed on, George walking a little closer

to the new hero. And yet —— ? The downward smile and those two big canine teeth somehow did not match. George was puzzled. He was both attracted and repelled. Obviously, his new friend was a foreigner, but from what country did he come ? And why did a foreign man come to England ?

The tall young man continued to smile upon him. He seemed to be perpetually smiling, as though his goodwill went out to all the world.

“ Bad boys, those two, hein ! They to your school go ? ”

George nodded.

“ We call them bullies.”

“ Bullies, that a new word is. I, the language learn.”

“ Are you French ? ” asked George.

The tall young man stiffened.

“ Mein Gott, I a Franzazer ! No, mein son, I German am. French you call them, Froggies. White negroes, we.”

“ I am sorry,” said George, “ I did not mean to be rude. We have always thrashed the French, haven’t we ? ”

“ At Waterloo, together. Ach, but Metz and Sedan. My father, he made —— ”

The young man seemed to bite off the sentence as though trapping the words that might have slipped from him.

“ You the school like ? ”

“ Not much.”

The German laughed.

“ They teach you the cricket and the football to play.

Not what learned and useful is. I know. And your name ? ”

“ George Gregson.”

“ George the son of Greg. Mine is Otto, Otto Schultze. I in an office work the language to learn. And you live ? ”

“ In Sussex Terrace.”

“ Ach, Sussex Terrace. That, a street is ? ”

“ Off the Painswick Road. There is a big house at the corner. I live at No. 2.”

There was silence, and George, looking up at Herr Otto Schultze, saw no smile upon his face. It seemed to have grown older, harder, a shut up sort of face. The eyes were steely, the lips pressed together. For the moment the German appeared to forget the small boy at his side, and marched along, head in air, arms swinging. George was puzzled. They were nearing the City Road, and in a few seconds they would part, and George knew that the Yarbury boys were not far behind them, and discretion prompted him to get quickly across the City Road and into one of the side streets where he might dodge Messrs. Yarbury & Co.

“ Have you the time, Mr. Schultze ? ”

“ Time ? ”

The young German came out of a dream. He thrust a hand under his coat and brought out a large silver watch. He turned its face to George.

“ Oh, ten minutes to nine ! I must run.”

“ We, again, walk another day ? ”

George nodded, smiled, and bolted.

Mr. Otto Schultze walked on to that office in the city where, with three other young Germans, he sat on stools and made entries in large ledgers. It was the office of a Shipping Merchant in Fenchurch Street, an English firm with a somewhat continental flavour, and a little man named Miller, alias Muller, at its head. Mr. Otto Schultze climbed the stairs, opened a door with the firm's name painted upon it, and proceeded to hang up his hat and coat in the outer office where five other young men were already at work. The removal of his hat showed to the world something that Georgie Gregson had not seen, a long red scar beginning high on the forehead, and disappearing amid the close cropped hair, a duelling scar, a badge of honour. The three other young Germans wished Mr. Schultze good-morning, but the two English members of the

clerical staff took no notice of him at all. The atmosphere was not genial. As Bob Scales said to Harry Megson, "Damn these Germans, they work too hard. I wouldn't mind doing ten hours a day, but dash it, I won't sleep two in a bed and wash once a month, just to learn the lingo and suck up to old Miller."

If Herr Otto Schultze's compatriots were more than a little interested in his social status, neither Mr. Scales nor Mr. Megson were at all so. They were not observant young men, and they were absorbed in sex, and they saw no subtle otherness in Otto Schultze. He was just another damned German, rather upstanding and aloof, with cold eyes and a scar on his head, and canine teeth that were unusually prominent. They supposed that he had won that wound as a student at a German university, and what was a German university anyway? Not Oxford or Cambridge, though Messrs. Scales & Megson spoke slightly if curiously of the products of the Isis and the Cam. They might bet on the Boat Race, and wear the light or dark blue ribbon, for that was English, but respect for the seats of learning was not in them. Their parents had not been able to afford that sort of thing, therefore it was to be sneered at.

Otto mounted his stool. He curled his long legs round it, and opened his ledger. He had very fine strong hands, not like the coarser hands of his fellows. He was different, and the others had sensed the difference, and wondered about it. Herr Otto was something of a mystery. He had come to learn the language, and still spoke it haltingly in the office, and harnessed the verb to the end of the sentence, but Heinrich Schmidt, listening outside Mr. Miller's door when Schultze had been called into the principal's office, had heard Herr Schultze speaking easy and fluent English.

Yes, Herr Otto was something of a mystery. He had a cold young dignity, and very correct manners. He did not fraternise. He carried about with him a suggestion of military aloofness, heels that could click, legs and back that were not for ledgers. Well, perhaps he was doing something for the Fatherland, the Fatherland that had smashed Austria & France, a Fatherland whose destiny was to dominate the earth in arms and trade and culture. The other young Germans were deferential to Herr Otto Schultze. They suspected that he might belong to the aristocratic caste. He might even be a baron !

Pens scribbled, heads were bent ; Bob Scales was telling

Henry Megson a bawdy story when Mr. Goldstein, Mr. Miller's understudy, came into the outer office and wagged his beard at it. Mr. Goldstein had a huge voice which he made every effort to subdue, but even if he whispered, it rumbled.

"Herr Schultze, Mr. Miller wants you."

Otto Schultze got off his stool, and strolled to the door. Mr. Goldstein made way for him. A little, drab passage led to Mr. Miller's room, and Mr. Miller was as drab as the passage, a small, dusty looking man with thin pale hair, and eyes that bulged behind high powered glasses. Mr. Goldstein remained outside, and Otto Schultze closed the door. He and Mr. Miller looked hard at each other. Mr. Miller began to speak, giving Otto some directions about a particular consignment of goods to South America, but while he spoke he took a letter from a drawer and pushed it across the desk.

Otto Schultze picked it up and pocketed it.

"That is all, Mr. Miller?"

"Yes, for the moment. I want the bill of lading seen to."

Otto gave him a stiff little bow and a frosty smile, and went back to his stool. He did not take out the letter and look at it. That would be a very private affair.

Blank

Chapter 5

GEORGIE GREGSON, like other residents in Sussex Terrace, was interested in that strange window high up in the cliff face of Rye House. There was always a head at that window, sometimes two heads, but even when there was only one head, it might be dead or alive. Why did they keep an image up there ? — for Mr. Clapp had assured George that it was a bust. Mr. Clapp's curiosity was such that he had taken a pair of opera-glasses into the house of a friend in the Allardyce Road and had studied the subject from the friend's window.

“ It's dead, Dick, dead as mutton.”

“ Why keep the thing there ? ”

“ Ask the Sphinx, my lad ! Well, I like a piece of mystery.”

So did George. Perhaps, Rye House was a Bluebeard House, and strange and tragic things happened and had happened in it. Were there cupboards full of corpses, ladies without heads, and heads with bloody hair ? It is a mistake to imagine that even in London you can remain comfortably anonymous, and that no one is interested in your morals and your calling and your income. Sussex Terrace gossiped about Rye House and No. 1. Imaginative ladies

wondered whether old Mr. Guy kept a secret harem. He looked a very wicked old man, and as capable as Punch of bludgeoning his wife and other people. The inhabitants of No. 1 were also very singular creatures.

“Have you noticed, my dear,” said Mrs. Clapp to a friend, “that they never go out together.”

“You mean that strange black-looking man?”

“Exactly.”

“Perhaps it isn’t his wife?”

Mrs. Clapp agreed that that was very likely. And what did the man do for a living? He looked foreign. He might be one of those dreadful anarchists to whom a foolish country gave refuge. He might be a forger or a spy, or a fraudulent fellow who had shaved away a beard and moustache. Sussex Terrace was imagining all sorts of things about No. 1. It rather liked to think the worst about its neighbours. Virtue is so dull, in others.

Said Josiah Wedgewood Clapp to his wife, “Well, if you are so interested, my dear, why not call on No. 1?”

Charlotte both scorned the suggestion and reflected upon it. There was no objection to her ringing the bell of No. 1 sometime after three o’clock on any afternoon when her husband was not at home. A display of neighbourliness

might enable her to penetrate the mystery, if there was a mystery, which she was sure there was. She would be able to boast about her exploit, for, after all, life in Sussex Terrace was somewhat dull. Mrs. Clapp would not admit its dullness, for that way lay sin. You should count your blessings, and distrust your neighbours, and obtain your excitement by nagging or hectoring your husband. So, Mrs. Clapp put on her best bonnet and winter coat, and with black gloved hands and wagging bustle, walked the ten yards to the door of No. 1. She stood on the doorstep and waited. No one came to answer the bell. Mrs. Clapp rang it three times with increasing emphasis, growing more and more convinced that No. 1 was a mystery house and had something to conceal. Of course there might be no one at home, but the unfriendly silence of the house caused Mrs. Clapp to do that which pleased her, think the worst.

After five minutes on the doorstep she retraced her steps, her bustle wagging even more disapprovingly. Josiah Wedgewood had come to regard that bustle as a sort of weather-glass. The more it wagged, the more you could infer that the moral atmosphere was stormy. Mrs. Clapp did not tell her husband of her adventure. She did not like to be frustrated. She decided to try again. She did repeat

the experiment, but with no more success, and Mrs. Clapp was convinced that No. 1 Sussex Terrace was evil.

Georgie Gregson had no such prejudices. It was a Saturday afternoon, and a half holiday, and George was out for exercise and exploration. He was going to look at the window of the Soldier Shop, but not with any idea of buying anything there. George was saving up now for Christmas presents, one for mother, one for father, and one for Ethel who had been his nurse. They could cost no more than threepence a piece, for George also purchased Christmas cards, and candles and penny Chinese lanterns. He would go in and say good day to the nice girl in the shop, and see if there were any chestnuts left in Highbury Fields. They might be covered with silver paper and used for decorations. The Gregson house, No. 11 Royal Terrace, Southend, kept a royal Christmas. George would find a pillowcase hanging at the foot of his bed ; he might feel it and hope for soldiers, but honour forebade him to delve inside it until his father called him into that other room, and he opened his parcels on his parent's bed. Now, that which had been denied to virtue was vouchsafed to innocence, for, as George was about to pass the door of No. 1, a lady came out of it, a very pretty lady, so Georgie

thought. He was very sensitive to looks, and Ann Hyde was no Charlotte Clapp.

George hesitated, freckled face upturned. The lady looked at him and smiled, and when she smiled her eyes were lovely. George smiled back. Not only did he smile ; he took off his cap.

“ Going for a walk, dear ? ”

“ Yes,” said George, “ I am going to Highbury Corner.”

“ So am I.” said she.

George put himself besides her, walking on the outside of the pavement as a gentleman should.

“ Pocket-money day, isn't it ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ Ginger-beer and sweets ? ”

Now, how did she know that, and that he would be tempted and resist ?

“ No, I have to look at presents for mother and father.”

“ I see. A very serious business.”

“ And Christmas cards and candles. I save up.”

“ How much a week ? ”

“ Threepence. It takes such a long time, so I look, and look. Do you think a needle-case is a nice present ? ”

“ Very.”

“ And a tie for father, but that costs rather a lot. Are you buying presents ? ”

“ Not today, dear. Groceries, and the butcher. You live next door to us, don't you ? ”

“ Yes, with Mr. Clapp. I like Mr. Clapp, but —— ”

He refrained, and she smiled at him suddenly.

“ I think I know Mr. Clapp by sight. A very large gentleman.”

“ Yes. They call him the Elephant at school, but elephants are clever and strong, aren't they ? ”

“ And kind, when they are well treated, especially to little boys.”

“ Yes, I had a ride on one at the zoo. Mr. Clapp took me. Mrs. Clapp wasn't there.”

Again the lady smiled. She was wiser than Mr. Clapp knew.

“ And what is your name, dear ? ”

“ Georgie Gregson. My father's a doctor. I'm going to be a doctor, if I can't be a soldier.”

“ And do you like school ? ”

“ Not much,” said Georgie ; “ they don't make you learn the things that you want to know. I like history, especially battles, and the drawing lessons. But 'rithmetic and

algebra ! Why have we got to know algebra ? Do you ? ”

“ No, dear, not a word of it ! ”

George gave her an admiring look. Well, if she did not know algebra, was algebra necessary ?

They crossed Highbury Grove together, and arriving at Highbury Corner prepared to take leave of each other.

The lady was going on down the Finsbury Road, because the shops were cheaper there, and George wanted to look into his favourite window. Ann Hyde was thinking, “ What a nice child. Just the age for Rachel. But then —— ! Would it matter ? Must one keep everything out of a house ? ” She bent down and kissed George, who was quite ready to be kissed, not having reached that age of dreadful and awkward male self-consciousness. “ Goodbye, dear. Be careful of the traffic.” She hurried on, as though leaving something that she had desired behind her, and George watched her walk away. She did not walk like Mrs. Clapp, wagging her bustle and pricking her shoulders ; she glided, yet George did notice that her skirt looked rather shabby.

He crossed to Upper Street, and arriving at the happy window, put his face close to the glass. Was there anything new and desirable ? There was. Someone, presumably the

pretty girl, had arranged a company of Prussian infantry upon a shelf, blue coated and wearing spiked helmets, and advancing upon some unseen enemy with bayonets at the charge. George felt the prick of desire, an eagerness to add those dark blue Prussians to his army, but the thing could not be done. The weekly savings had to be cherished for his Christmas presents.

Neither George nor the lady had noticed that someone had been following them with sauntering casualness. George was still looking at the blue infantry when he heard a voice speaking to him.

“ You soldiers like, leetle friend ? ”

George turned about, to find Mr. Schultze standing behind him. He and the young German had more than once walked citywards together, and George was beginning to find the smiling blue eyes making him forget the canine teeth. Surely, there could be nothing sinister about a young man who was always smiling ? ”

“ Yes, I have lots of soldiers. I was looking at those Prussians.”

“ Ach, sso ! ” and Herr Schultze’s blue eyes seemed to pierce the window, and suddenly he drew himself up very straight, and his hand went to the brim of his hat.

"Aren't they splendid." said George.

"Grenadiers of the Guard, George. Ach, they must be charging lousy Frenchmen. Those are the fellows who made the French run outside Metz and at Sedan."

George looked up into the German's face. It was fierce and proud, arrogant. Well, surely a man had a right to be proud of such soldiers ! Moreover, Mr. Schultze's English had improved, or it had been stimulated by occasion.

"They must have charged just like that." said George.

"I think the French red trousers look silly."

"We could see them, to shoot. Pigs trotters. Have you any Prussians like that ? "

"No, only marching ones in my army."

"You should have the furor Teutoncius in your army, George. I will buy you those Prussians."

George stared.

"Give them to me ? "

"Yes."

George was astonished, but delighted. He jigged up and down on his toes.

"Oh, but Mr. Schultze, they'll cost an awful lot."

The German laughed.

"How much, you think ? "

“ Two and sixpence.”

Mr. Schultze took George by the shoulder and marched him into the shop. The pretty girl was in charge, and she had lost her cold and a rather red nose. She smiled upon George, and she smiled, but a little differently, upon the young man. Herr Schultze raised his hat. It behoved a man to be polite in a foreign country, and the wench was comely.

“ Those soldiers in the window, Miss, the Prussian Guards. How much ? ”

“ The ones on the shelf, sir ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ Three shillings. You see, there are three dozen in the box.”

“ And made in Germany.” laughed Herr Otto.

“ Yes, sir.”

“ At Nuremburg. Ach, you should see Nuremburg.”

George was on tenterhooks, and clutching the counter. Would three shillings be too much, and ought he to accept a present from a stranger ? ”

“ I will take them,” said Herr Schultze, “ they are for my leetle friend George.”

The girl simpered. This German gentleman had an air,

and a way of looking at you that made you feel good.

“ George is a lucky boy, sir.”

“ I am.” said George, “ Thank you ever so much, Mr Schultze.”

The Prussians were collected from the window and packed into their box, layer by layer. Herr Schultze helped the girl, and more than once their fingers touched. George looked lovingly at his new soldiers, and did not notice the bye-play between the girl and the man. The box was wrapped up, and Herr Schultze paid his three shillings. He took off his hat, looked fixedly at the girl, gave her a sudden smile, and walked George out of the shop.

“ Where you go now, George ? ”

“ I am going home.” said George, “ to open the box.”

“ I will walk with you a leetle way. You were walking with a lady, were you not ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ Your master’s frau, wife ? ”

“ Oh, no,” said George, “ Mrs. Clapp is not like that. She lives at No. 1.”

“ Ach, sso ! Do you know her name ? ”

George was cuddling his box.

“ Mrs. Hyde, I think.”

The German laughed.

“ Hide and seek ! That a joke is ! Now, George, I must my exercise take. Run home and play with the soldiers.”

George put out a hand.

“ Thank you, ever so much, Mr. Schultze.”

II

GEORGIE GREGSON did not go straight home, for, like Mr. Schultze, he was supposed to be out for exercise, and Mrs. Clapp would reprimand him if he came home too early. He had left Mr. Schultze at Highbury Corner, and seen him walk off down the Finsbury Road, and he scuttled across into Highbury Fields, and finding a deserted seat far away from humanity's comings and goings, he sat down, and unwrapped the box. He wanted to gloat over his lovely new regiment with their spiked helmets and bright bayonets. He had nearly three hundred soldiers in his army, and these Prussians, with his English grenadiers and his lancers would form a corps d'elite. He would set them charging his old red legged Frenchmen, a regiment that was growing shabby and war-worn. Frenchmen were cowards. Had not Herr Schultze said so ! They would turn and run.

George peered into his box, raising the pad of paper

between the first and second layer. Thirty six splendid new soldiers ! When he went home for Christmas he would give Roland Baker's army the biggest wopping it had ever had. The boy repacked the box. If Mrs. Clapp caught him and catechised him he could say he had been buying Christmas presents. A lady of Mrs. Clapp's fussiness did not encourage veracity in the young.

George walked twice round Highbury Fields, asked an old gentleman the time, and then thought it safe to make for home. He slipped into No. 2 Sussex Terrace without being waylaid by Mrs. Clapp, and he bolted for The Rookery. The glass panel was rather high for him to see through, and he had opened the door before he realised that Mr. Clapp was at work in the room. Mr. Clapp was going through his holiday sketch-book, and strangely enough it contained studies of the Rhineland country and the Tyrol.

"Hallo, my lad ! Been buying presents ?"

George laid his parcel on the table and took off his hat and coat.

"It's soldiers."

"What, more soldiers ? Oh George, George, was the temptation too strong ?"

George did not mind telling things to Mr. Clapp.

“ A gentleman gave them to me.”

“ Indeed ? ”

“ A German gentleman. He bought them for me at the shop.”

Mr. Clapp was interested, and responsibly so. George had to describe his new acquaintance, and how the thing had come about. Mr. Clapp was not a suspicious person, but he did understand that it was a little unusual for strange and foreign young men to make presents to anonymous small boys. Mr. Clapp rubbed his chin, and looked at the box, and at George's bright young face. Yes, one should not offend against babes and sucklings, but Mr. Clapp, as a man and a schoolmaster, had to remember.

“ George, my dear, one should not take presents from strangers.”

George's eyes opened wide.

“ Oughtn't I, sir ? ”

“ Well, one has to be careful.”

“ But Mr. Schultze isn't quite a stranger. I've walked three times with him to school.”

“ And where does Mr. Schultze go ? ”

“ To somewhere in the city.”

George had unpacked the box and lifted the lid. Mr. Clapp looked at the Prussians, rubbed his chin, and

considered the problem.

“ Yes, they are very nice, George, but —— ”

“ Do you think I ought to give them back, sir ? ”

“ N-no, perhaps it is not as serious as that. Mr. Schultze is a nice young man, you say ? ”

“ I think so, Mr. Clapp, though he has rather funny teeth.”

“ Funny teeth, George ? ”

“ Yes, two of them stick out so.”

Again Mr. Clapp rubbed his chin. Now why should a young German give a small English boy a present ? As it happened, Mr. Clapp knew his Germany rather well, and spoke the language efficiently. He had studied at a German university, and taken many holidays across the Rhine. Casual generosity was not exactly a Teutonic virtue. Your German, like your Scot, liked value for money. Mr. Clapp was plagued by sudden, sinister suspicions. He would like to meet this Mr. Otto Schultze. In fact, it was very necessary that he should make contact with him.

“ I should like to meet your Mr. Schultze, George.”

George smiled and said that it should be easy. Mr. Schultze was often to be met at the end of Ellgood Terrace.

Chapter 6

AT two o'clock, Miss Slade's "Caterpillar" pushed its head out of the gate of "Arnold House" and trailed down the hill towards the sea and the parade. Miss Slade was an admirer of the Rugby tradition, and had both christened her house after Dr. Arnold and framed her discipline upon the same austere model though she did not birch young gentlewomen. Miss Slade was a beast, but a just beast, and her tongue was as capable as any cane of keeping order in the school. Miss Slade did not conduct the two o'clock symphony parade. She was too elevated for such routine. Miss Landon was in charge, and Miss Landon was a popular person. She was rarely sneering or sarcastic, and she had kind eyes.

The younger girls led the procession. They were graded in age until the Misses Manners were reached, the senior girls of the school, but the school was not all manners. It contained the normal sprinkling of little snobs, sadists, and feminine exhibitionists, those who were sex self-conscious and those who still were virgin. Rachel Hyde was in the middle of the queue, and Rachel Hyde was unhappy. She had the two Biggar girls behind her, twins,

and the Biggar girls were her particular persecutors. They had eyes of anything in a victim that could be wounded, and Rachel was feeling very vulnerable.

The procession crossed the broad roadway to the left of Warrior Square, and turned right along the parade towards St. Leonards. Socially, St. Leonards was more elevated than Hastings, though why and where this more refined atmosphere began, no one could say. Rachel, being the daughter of her mother, preferred the Hastings old town, and Rock-a-Nore, and the fishermen and the boats and the smells of reality.

Rachel was a dark, sensitive child with pansy eyes and a very expressive mouth. She was quick of temper and quick of colour, and humiliations, especially when they affected those whom she loved, made her flesh into fury. Gertie Biggar had just trodden willfully upon her heel, and had remarked that girls whose parents were so poor or miserly that they could not afford to buy you new shoes or stockings, were objects both of pity and of ridicule.

“ She’s got a hole in her stocking.” said Irene.

“ Well, they were old last term.”

“ Paltry, I call it.”

Rachel’s warm colour was rising. She knew the Biggar

girls only too well, and that any display of passion would delight them. She tried to shut her ears and look at the sea, and the crinkles of light on it, and Beachy Head blue grey in the distance. Why were some people such beasts to you ?

The torment went on.

“ Well, if my father couldn’t afford to send me to school properly, I’d rather go home.”

“ Quite.” sneered Irene, “ just snobbery of course. I wonder what he does.”

“ It can’t be much. She’s had that coat two years, and —— ”

Mary Viner was walking besides Rachel, and Mary was Rachel’s friend. She too had a quick temper.

“ Someone keeps a butcher shop. Look at their meaty faces.”

“ I beg your pardon ! ” said a voice from behind.

“ People who live in butchers shops,” said Mary, “ always have raw faces and raw minds.”

“ You lying little slut.”

This was no language for young gentlewomen, and Miss Landon heard it. Miss Landon had quick and comprehending ears, and she had been listening. She did not like the

Biggar girls ; they were she-louts of the first water, who talked refinedly through their noses when they wished to impress and had vulgar, smutty minds.

“ Stop, all of you, please.”

The Caterpillar halted.

“ Miss Gertrude & Miss Irene Biggar, come to the back here. You will walk in front of the Misses Manners, though you do not possess those qualities.”

Very rare was it for Miss Landon to use such sarcasm. The Misses Biggar tossed their heads, exchanged glances, and did not move.

“ Did you hear what I said ? ”

Gertie sniffed.

“ It isn't our fault, Miss Landon.”

“ Oh, no, of course not ! You will obey my order, or —— ”

The school was sniggering and exulting. The Biggar girls were not loved, and for once they had been caught out.

“ I beg to differ, Miss Landon.” said Irene.

“ Then the school will go on with Miss Manners in charge, and you will go back with me to see Miss Slade.”

The threat was sufficient, for an interview with Miss Slade was no mean menace. She stopped your pocket-money

and your jam, and kept you in at French when the other girls were out, and the Biggar girls were greedy wenches. They broke formation, and noses in air, took up the new position in front of the Misses Manners.

The Misses Manners had a supreme contempt for the Biggar World, and subtle ways of showing it. They were tall, blonde, and rather lofty young women, the aristocrats of the school. Their father was a colonel and in India. Mr. Biggar was a commercial something-or-other in the City.

The school moved on, but for Rachel Hyde the sea had become a wet blicker, and Beachy Head a blur. She was blubbing, which she knew was silly and futile, but when your temper was in tear and could not spend itself, something broke inside you. It was such a lovely world, if people would only let it be lovely. And why, the Biggar girls? Why taunts, and sneers, and persecution? Did the Biggar world find pleasure in hurting you and seeing you flare or wince? Most obviously it did.

She felt Mary Viner's fingers groping for her's.

"It doesn't matter what those beasts say."

"Shouldn't do, but ——"

Rachel gulped, and then set her teeth.

"Have I a hole in my stocking, Mary?"

Mary fell a step behind and looked.

“ No.”

“ The beastly liars ! I think I’ve forgotten my handkerchief.”

“ I’ll lend you mine, dear.”

One’s parents might be poor but why should that be thrown at you as an offence ? Was it shameful to be poor ? Had not Christ said, “ blessed are the poor ? ” or was it just snobbery, nastiness ? Rachel did not tell herself that she was the prettiest child in the school ; she may not have been conscious of it, or of its early implications. Mary Viner, a year older, might have been able to explain both pride and prejudice, the instinctive enmity of the raw-boned and the vain and the vulgar to anything that was loveable to look at and easy to wound.

“ I don’t want to hurt anybody,” said Rachel, “ and why should —— ”

“ Just spite, dear. You’ve got something they’ll never have.”

It was a very decorous parade. Miss Slade’s young ladies were supposed to march eyes-front, and not to gawk in at shop windows, and most certainly not to exchange glances with anything in trousers. The Biggar girls would have

ogled bishops, butcher-boys and sweeps, and collected precocious tribute from any source, but they were under the eyes of the Misses Manners and Miss Landon. Probably, Miss Slade's school would be one of the last to cultivate decorum, call it humbug or discipline, whichever you please. Sport and self expression were to inherit the earth, and the demur and perhaps sly small lady become the fat legged flapper in blue serge, with hockey-stick or tennis racquet, and a clumsy sexlessness which made men wonder how any lad would be moved to folly by the product when it matured. But mature it did.

Miss Landon was reflecting upon the incident, and watching her responsibilities. She was feeling moved to parade the Biggar girls before Miss Slade, even to suggest that the school would be more hygenic if the Biggar girls were dispensed with. Oh, bother finance and school-fees ! Miss Landon would like to have cultivated a school as she would have cultivated a garden, extruded the coarse weeds, the docks and the nettles, and particularly any plant to which the ancients had applied the attribute of "Stinking."

Miss Landon brought the school home in time for tea, just when a winter sun was making a red blur over Beach Head.

Yes, she would parade those two vulgar she-louts before Miss Slade, but before she could do so, another message reached her.

Old Nannie, the housekeeper brought it.

“ Miss Slade’s compliments, and she wishes to see Miss Hyde.”

II

MISS SLADE’S sanctum on the first floor was entered, as a rule, with tremblings and trepidation. A summons from Miss Slade usually portended solemn sarcasm, and an acumen that dealt ruthlessly with fibs and fabrications. Rachel knocked at Miss Slade’s door, but the voice that said “ Come in ” was not the voice either of an implacable pedagogue or of an outraged Jenovan. Miss Slade was sitting in her straight-backed chair by the window, and looking much like Whistlers portrait of his mother. Her hair and her lace cap were of the same colour. Her hands were folded in the lap of her plain black satin dress.

Miss Slade stretched out a hand to the child.

“ Come here, Rachel, my dear.”

Miss Slade’s voice could be infinitely gentle to the

right people, and a scourge to the forward and the smug self-excusers. Rachel's little face had looked pinched and apprehensive, but suddenly it melted. She crossed the room and stood by Miss Slade's chair, and Miss Slade put an arm round her.

" Rachel, dear, I have had a letter from your mother."

" Yes, Miss Slade."

" I am afraid you will have to leave us. I am sorry. We have liked having you here, my dear. I am sorry."

Rachel's lips quivered.

" So am I, Miss Slade. Do I have to ? "

" At the end of the half term, I'm afraid. I have been in correspondence with your mother. Personally, I should like to have kept you with us, but your mother's reasons have impressed me, and I respect them."

Rachel was silent, looking out of the window. She noticed that Miss Slade had not given her the reasons given by her mother, and that was nice of her, for Rachel was not unwise as to the situation."

" Thank you, Miss Slade."

" Thank you for what, my dear ? "

" For being kind to me."

Miss Slade gave the slim and sensitive body a little hug.

“ That is not difficult. I am sorry. You are the kind of child I like to have with me.”

Rachel's lips quivered even more poignantly. Her tears were sudden, and Miss Slade took her head and caressed it.

“ There, my dear, the woes of the young are quick and bitter. But they pass. I seem to see happiness for you. Your mother is a woman who ——— ”

Rachel sobbed.

“ There is no one quite like mother.”

“ That is as it should be, my dear. Hold fast to those who love you. Remember, do not shut them out of your life. And pray to God, dear. Peace comes to us through prayer.”

III

THE school might not rub it into her, but Rachel knew that the school knew that her father must be a failure. She was being taken away because he was so much of a failure that he could not afford to pay her fees. What shame ! Even her poor shabby clothes and shoes shouted her father's ill success to all the world, for, to these young women poverty meant failure. What shame ! Rachel was more sensitive than most children upon the subject of home and its social

decorations. She loved her mother ; her father less so ; her father was a storm-cloud of a man who sometimes made her afraid. But, poor father, poor in paltry ways ! If children cherish a desire to be proud of those who have begotten them, then Rachel was more human than most children. She wanted the hero and the heroine, she wanted to feel pleasure and devotion, to be able to cry, even to herself.

“ Aren’t mother and father wonderful ! ” And mother was wonderful. Why not father also ? What was poverty ? That you could not do things as other people did them, or that you did not do the things that other people wanted ?

Rachel was in the deeps of a secret and childish humiliation. She was to hear the Misses Biggar remark that her father was a beggarly bankrupt.

What was a bankrupt ?

She did kneel down by her bed and pray, “ Oh, God, please don’t let father be a failure.”

Yet, torture would not have drawn the secret from her soul.

It was Mary Viner who helped to pack her trunk, a Mary Viner who invented a lie and cast it in the Biggar faces.

“ Fudge, you snobs. Rachel’s going to school in Germany to learn the language. You can go back to Tooting.”

An old four-wheeler took Rachel and her trunk to St. Leonard's Station. Miss Slade, Miss Landon, and Mary Viner went with her.

"You will write, darling, won't you?"

"Of course I will," said Rachel, trying to smother tears.

She waved to the three as the train steamed out, and then sat down in her third-class corner, and bit at a rather wet little handkerchief. She must not make an exhibition of herself. Mother was to meet her at Charing Cross. She must show a bright face to her mother.

V

BY the time the train reached Battle her tears were conquered, and she had won another Senlac. Battle! What a strange name to impose upon a peaceful village! But she knew all about 1066, for Miss Slade's school had been conducted in person over the Abbey grounds by that Sussex Worthy, Mr. Augustus Roper. Rachel looked out of the window. She saw the high elms laced against the winter sky, and the stout grey tower of the church, and the steep hill down which the Saxons had fled. The train steamed on and entered a cutting deep in woods, and Rachel gave a

little shiver. She was an imaginative child, and through such woods desperate and bloody men must have plunged on that disastrous day in October.

There were three other people in the carriage, but they were not interested in children, nor was Rachel particularly interested in them. She was a child who could withdraw into a corner, and dream dreams, dreams that were so much more mysterious and alluring than human faces. Faces could seem so flat. Also, she had kept her own small problems to envisage. Would she go to school again somewhere in Canonbury? What would life be like in that rather bleak London house? She had spent but a part of her last holiday there. And why had Uncle James taken that huge house next door? It seemed so very big and superfluous for one old man. She liked Uncle James, but he too was supposed to be poor. Yes, otherwise he might have helped her mother and father with her school-fees.

Fog! They steamed into it at Lewisham, though the sun had been shining over the Sussex sea. It grew yellower and yellower, and darker and darker, and Charing Cross was a great cave of gloom. Unlike Georgie Gregson, Rachel did not like fogs; they might be mysterious, but they were menacing. Also, it was cold and raw, and the carriage was

unheated, and her clothes none of the thickest.

A porter swung the door open, and the fog poured in.

Rachel was up and about to climb out when a hand was placed on her shoulder, and a voice said, " Little girls should let their elders go first." Rachel shrank back and let them pass, an acid and withered woman with a depressed little sparrow of a husband.

" Porter, m'am ? " said the man who had opened the door.

" No. " said the lady decisively.

" I want a porter, please."

" Right you are, missie. Rather look after you than that. Where from ? "

" St Leonards."

" Front van. Anything in the carriage ? "

" No, thank you."

He grinned at her.

" Funny how some people can't spare a thank you."

The trunk was collected. The porter shouldered in it, and together they passed the barrier, Rachel giving up the ticket she had been clutching. Her mother was there. Oh, blessed and consoling presence ! Rachel rushed at her mother and was embraced. Warm kisses were given and taken. Ann Hyde's eyes had a poignant look.

“ Cab, m’am ? ”

“ Yes, please.”

They climbed into a cab, and the porter accepted three pennies from the lady, and was thanked, and thanked her in return. Manners can be more magical than Mammon. Fog, blurred lights, a shadow world, with the cab crawling through endless streets. Ann Hyde sat with her arm round her daughter. There was a strange quick sympathy between them, and Ann Hyde seemed to know that the child had suffered. How sensitive some children could be, even to the problems that humiliated their elders !

“ Soon be home, dear. Cold ? ”

“ No, mother.”

“ Hands a bit cold though. Where are your gloves ? ”

Rachel hesitated.

“ I’m so sorry. I lost them.”

As a matter of fact they had become so shabby that Rachel had discarded them.

The cab took them along Upper Street and the Essex Road. Rachel was aware of her mother feeling in a black handbag. Her mother’s face looked anxious. They came to No. 1 Sussex Terrace. The cabman got down and lowered the trunk.

“ Carry it inside for you, m’am ? ”

“ No, thank you, we can manage.”

“ How much ? ”

“ Five bob, m’am.”

Her mother’s face looked stricken.

“ Five shillings ! ”

“ Yes, m’am. It’s a long way up ‘ere.”

Rachel was aware of her mother’s fingers picking coins out of the bag. They came out in driblets, a florin, a shilling, two sixpences, and then, there was a pause.

“ I’m sorry. I shall have to get some money from my husband. Ring the bell, dear.”

Rachel rang the bell. She wished, oh how she wished, that she had money in her pocket.

The door opened. She saw her father’s face.

“ Hallo, young woman.”

“ Mother wants some money, father.”

“ Money ! ”

His black eyebrows seemed to draw together.

“ How much, Nan ? ”

“ One and sixpence.”

“ Good lord ! ”

He felt in a trouser pocket, and from the proceeds of the

dive, counted out eleven coppers and one sixpence."

" Here you are. That will do."

The cabman grumbled. A fivepenny tip on a five bob drive.

" Not good enough, gov'nor."

Rachel saw her father's face, flare white.

" You go to hell, my man ! "

" And you go to Grub Street, gov'nor."

Her mother hurried her into the house. Her father was lugging her trunk inside, and the cabbie was indulging in more vulgar sarcasm. Such was her home-coming.

Chapter 7

MRS. PART, who let lodgings, and most respectable lodgings at No. 9 Ellgood Crescent, heard Mr. Adolph Adler come up the steps and open the front door. Mr. Adler was whistling a Strauss waltz, and whistling it very well, and Mrs. Part did not object to this mouth-music. She liked these young German gentlemen ; they gave no trouble, appeared to work hard, and paid her regularly, and did not use the towels to clean their boots. Never had they attempted to smuggle anything in petticoats into the house, or come home the worse for liquor. Mrs. Part had very austere views upon the consumption of alcohol, for Mr. Part — The Bloody Part — as the vulgar had called him, had died of cirrhosis of the liver. Mr. Alder ran up the stairs, still whistling. He and his friend occupied a sitting-room and two bedrooms on the first floor, and Mrs. Part was preparing their supper.

Herr Adler opened the sitting-room door. He was wearing a voluminous black ulster with a cape, and things bulged in its pockets. He was a lean, dark young man with well developed masticatory muscles, rather insolent brown eyes, and hair that would grow in little virile curls.

Herr Adler had an air that suggested the free-lance and the swashbuckler, and a spirit that was ready to rape all that adventure could give him. Even his whistling celebrated "War, Women & Wine," and you took them between the waltzes.

Otto Schultze was kneeling by the fire, watching something burn. He looked up and round at his friend who was unbuttoning his ulster. It was noticeable that Herr Otto Schultze did not trouble to smile when he was off the stage.

"Meet the old cow?"

"No."

Adolph took the two halves of a flute out of one pocket, and a folded blue cap with a black peak out of the other. He laid them on the table. Herr Otto scowled at them.

"Put those things away. And go and change before the old frau comes up."

Adolph showed a set of very white teeth.

"Yes, your Excellency!"

He flung off the ulster like a duellist discarding a cloak with bravura and swagger. He was wearing a shabby dark blue uniform, the uniform of a member of an itinerant German band. The long tunic came down to his knees, and

the trousers below it were civilian.

“ Any luck, my baron ? ”

“ Go and take off that besotted coat.”

“ I will, your Excellency.”

“ And remember to lock it and those other things in your trunk.”

Herr Adolph went off whistling, but he took care to lock the bedroom door while he was changing.

Herr Otto stirred the fire with a poker, and watched the black film of the paper he had been burning flutter and fall to ashes. It behoved all Germans to be thorough, thorough and ruthless in the cause of the Fatherland, and when you lied there should be a friendly smile on your lips. He could hear Herr Adolph whistling. Adolph was a useful fellow when he could overcome his passion for the operatic.

Mrs. Part was mounting the stairs. She was a large and heavy woman, and the treads creaked under her. A supper tray was wedged against her big tight stomach. A useful cow, this, one who was too elephantine to creep about and listen. Herr Schultze got up and opened the door for Mrs. Part. Good manners could be tactfully employed in propitiating such a person. Herr Schultze's smile came on.

“ Thank you, sir.” said the landlady.

She could tell her neighbours that both Germans were perfect gentlemen, and both of them so very good looking.

Mrs. Part laid the table, while Herr Schultze sat studying an English Grammar. That too was good policy, and occasionally he would appeal to Mrs. Part and ask her to help in some puzzling piece of pronunciation.

He appealed to her tonight, pointing with a long first finger at a particular word.

“ How do you that say ? ”

Mrs. Part peered.

“ Puff, sir.”

“ But, why puff, when it pough is ? ”

“ I can't say, sir. Seems silly, doesn't it ? ”

“ Very. Your English language der teufel is. It causes me much to worry.”

“ I shouldn't worry, sir. You speak it very well, I'm sure. And if you'll excuse me, I must go down or the chops may be burnt.”

“ That would a calamity be. Your good cooking to us so homely is.”

“ Thank you, sir.”

The Germans thought Mrs. Part's cooking execrable but

that had to be suffered in the cause of plunder and adventure. Tough chops, cabbage, boiled potatoes, rice pudding, a leathery fibre called Welsh Rarebit. Sausage and mash, suet pudding, pigs flesh, stale cheese. Mrs. Part seemed to ring the changes on these delicacies, and as Herr Adler said, "Thank the good God, we Germans have strong stomachs."

They sat down to chops and Somebody's Sauce, mashed potatoes and sprouts. Herr Adolph had put on a velvet jacket and a student's cap. They had heard Mrs. Part go creaking down the stairs.

"The old cow's stalled. Well, what news?"

"I have found the house."

"Thunder, is that so?"

Herr Otto sawed at his chop.

"Yes, and all through giving an English brat a box of soldiers. The next thing is to watch."

"Study the beast's habits."

"Yes. That is where the band may be useful. You can play there."

"But we cannot play there every day of the week."

"Am I moonstruck? We may want the band in other ways. Besides, these London fogs; they give one opportunities. I

too shall watch."

" When ? "

" At night. I want to know when the man comes out. I want to know how many come out. What a filthy mess the old frau makes of the potatoes ! "

II

GERMAN PHILOSOPHY may be too ready to assume that the mass of humanity is just so much muck to be used as dung or brick-earth, and German Philosophy may be right in its main contention, but to assume so much folly and just to trample on it may be poor politics. The more crass the fool, the more he may have to be fooled and flattered, and the carrot may be more persuasive than the goad or the whip. None the less, these two young Germans, nurtured upon Teutonic victories, and full of Germany's conquests in science and commerce, were too ready to suffer a racial arrogance to assume that other peoples were fools.

Mr. Josiah Wedgewood Clapp, rolling down the Allardyce Road besides Georgie Gregson, was ready to play behemoth to the Teutonic tiger. He would like to meet Herr Otto Schultze ; he intended to meet Herr Otto Schultze, and coincidence and Herr Otto obliged him.

They met where Ellgood Terrace joined the Allardyce Road, by the pillar-box under the great plane tree. George, smiling, introduced them. Mr. Clapp was genial and expansive.

“Very glad to meet you, sir. You have been very kind to Georgie.”

Mr. Clapp was voluminously bland and friendly. His spectacles were moons of mild benignity. Yes, he would walk with Herr Schultze as far as the City Road. He was delighted to make Herr Schultze's acquaintance. He pounded along beside the tall and rigid young German, with Georgie quick-stepping to keep in line. And how did Herr Schultze like London and its fogs? Herr Schultze, eyeing Mr. Clapp with oblique carefulness, was persuaded to label him a fat fool, arms and legs all over the place, yes, a fatuous mass of flabby animation.

Mr. Schultze said that he liked London very well. He was here to learn the language. He made his English halting. And had Mr. Clapp visited Germany?

Mr. Clapp beamed, but diffidently so.

“Only as a tourist, I'm afraid, and once. I went down the Rhine.”

The Rhine! Yes, all the silly English went down the

Rhine, and saw Cologne cathedral and Ehrenbrelstein.

What a hippo this animal was !

Maybe, Herr Schultze became less guarded. Did Mr. Clapp speak German ?

“ Very little, I’m afraid.”

Mr. Schultze tested him, and Mr. Clapp pretended not to understand.

“ I’m afraid I’m a fool at languages.”

Georgie Gregson was a little puzzled by the confession, for, at the school Mr. Clapp sometimes taught French and German classes. Herr Schultze smiled. He said the English had not the advantages or the incentive of the Continentals.

“ But we are incorrigibly lazy, my dear sir.” said Mr. Clapp.

Herr Schultze smiled, and gave a little shrug of the shoulders, no doubt this fat fool was right.

Mr. Clapp, meanwhile, was very much on the alert. He did not like this smiling and arrogant young man. He knew much more of Germany and its social shades than Herr Otto Schultze suspected, and Mr. Clapp was feeling that the young man was no mere clerk. Oh, no, Prussian, and aristocrat and army. So, why, the deception ? Mr. Schultze

was not commerce, and not the simple Teuton he wished to appear. Even his voice and his language were otherwise. Now, why was Mr. Schultze in London, and pretending to be a clerkly nobody ? What were the motives, ulterior and secret ? Why had Mr. Schultze sucked up to an English small boy ? It was not just human kindness. Mr. Clapp did not like those cold and arrogant eyes when they were not smiling, nor those canine teeth.

Mr. Clapp became even more benign and friendly. Herr Schultze must find himself rather lonely in London ? Yes, undoubtedly. And did Mr. Schultze like music ? Yes. Herr Schultze might like to sing some of the German lieder, Schubert's songs. What a master ! Perhaps Herr Schultze would care to come in some evening and enjoy a little music. He, Mr. Clapp, was very fond of the pianoforte and played it, yes, like an amateur. Unfortunately, the English were not a music nation. Herr Schultze gave Mr. Clapp a keen and considering glance, and then he smiled.

“ Your hospitality to me, very welcome is.”

It was. Here was a chance to penetrate the house next door, and perhaps to learn something about it and to gain a reason for being in that particular street.

“ Shall we fix a day ? ”

“ Delighted.”

“ Let us say Saturday at eight.”

They had reached the City Road, and Herr Schultze paused, put his heels together, and gave Mr. Clapp a little, brittle bow.

“ Tank you very much. I come will.”

George and Mr. Clapp went on their way, and George found Mr. Clapp unaccountably silent and absent. His large legs seemed to move with more rolling vigour, and George had to quicken his step. He looked up questioningly into the large man's face.

“ Did you like Mr. Schultze ? ”

Mr. Clapp suddenly remembered George.

“ Mr. Schultze interests me, Georgie.”

“ He knows a lot about soldiers and battles.”

“ So I should infer.”

George did not suspect Mr. Clapp of irony, nor had the ironical entered into George's life. His little, open, freckled face did not invite irony. Nor was he old enough to divine the esoteric workings of the big man's mind. Mr. Clapp had been reassured on one particular matter. He did not think that Herr Otto Schultze was the apostle of unpleasant perversion, or that he had any sinister designs

upon the person of Georgie Gregson. Pah, nasty business, that ! No, there might be something much more cold and material and acquisitive behind the social disguise that Mr. Clapp suspected Herr Schultze of having adopted. The man might be a spy. But to what ends ? Surely, peaceful England had nothing to teach militant Germany in the matter of arms and murderous inventions ?

Mr. Clapp was in an absent mood during the morning, so much so that he set the Lower First to draw a cone and put up a truncated column as a model. Inspecting some of the productions he began to detect contumacy in the class, and gradual giggles added to the suspicion.

“ Smith Minor, haven’t you eyes, sir, or is it just naughtiness ? ”

“ I’ve drawn what you put up, sir.”

Mr. Clapp glanced at the model.

“ Bless my soul ! ” and then he laughed, and the class laughed with him and not at him. That was why Mr. Clapp was popular. He could laugh at himself, even tell a funny story to his own confusion, but he could whack hard and judicially when the chastisement was justified.

“ I owe the class an apology. What shall we do about it ? ”

“ Do tell us one of your stories, Mr. Clapp.”

Mr. Clapp told his story.

III

RACHEL'S room at No. 1 Sussex Terrace was a little back room on the second floor, and its window overlooked the gardens. It was a "Rookery" view taken from a higher altitude, but on a dark winter morning the elms looked even more spectral and the hollies more sooty and strange. Brick walls cut the pattern into oblongs of sour turf, black beds and funereal shrubs. Somewhere down yonder in the middle distance she could see the gleam of water between two houses, the New River, glossy and mysterious on its way to its vanishing point near the Essex Road.

Her mother had said to her "Don't go up to the top-floor, dear. Father must not be disturbed."

Here, again, was mystery. What was it that her father occupied himself with up above there? Her father did not go to work like other men. He worked at home. She had heard her mother speak of her father's scientific researches; Ann Hyde avoided the word inventor. Rachel could infer that science, whatever it might be, seemed to make you neither rich nor famous. Yet the mystery

provoked her, and very innocently so. She could not help tiptoeing up the stairs to the top landing and looking at the forbidden door. It was a very ordinary and rather ugly door painted and grained to look like ochre coloured marble, but something protruded round its edges, a fabric that looked like felt, and was jammed between the door and its frame. Now, what was that for ? To intensify the silence in which her father liked to work ? Rachel was sufficiently human to put her eye to the keyhole, but it was a blind hole. Some substance obscured it.

Yet, what was that strange sound ? Something went chug, chug, chug, very softly and very deliberately. It could not be a clock. It couldn't be a pump. It sounded rather like some sort of engine. And there was a queer faint smell that seemed to seep out on to the landing, an oily smell. Rachel slipped back down the stairs. Her father was in there, and it would not do for her to be caught on the forbidden stairs. It was all very puzzling. Her mother seemed to spend hours in there with her father. Perhaps she helped him ? Then, too, the carefulness about the front door. It was kept locked and bolted. So were the area and the garden doors. If Rachel wanted to go out, her mother let her out and locked the door after her, nor was it easy to

get back into the house. If you returned before you were due, you might ring, and the bell would remain unanswered.

And why did they not keep a servant ?

Was it that they could not afford a servant ?

Her mother had to work so hard, making beds, cooking and cleaning. Things were shabby. There were holes in the sheets, and the pillowcases had been mended. Also, the food was very plain and sparse, much more so than at Miss Slade's. They had jam only twice a week.

Yes, they must be very poor, and Rachel was hurt by it, for her mother and father's sake. It was horrid to be poor, especially so when other people sneered at you.

Rachel wanted to help. No new school had yet been arranged for her, and Ann Hyde let her help. Rachel learnt to make beds, and go round with a dustpan and brush, and wash plates and dishes. She was feeling a very lonely child, and it helped to have things to do.

IV

IT was Saturday afternoon. Dinner was over, and Mr. Clapp made mystic signs to Georgie Gregson.

“ Payday, my dear.”

George followed Mr. Clapp down into the Rookery, and was told to close the door. Mr. Clapp had had trouble with his wife over his invitation to Herr Otto Schultze, for when Mr. Clapp had suggested that Germans liked beer, Charlotte had looked shocked.

“ Certainly not, Wedgewood. How can you be so vulgar ! ”

“ Well, my dear —— ”

“ Cocoa, perhaps, or tea.”

“ Let it be tea, Charlotte.”

For Mr. Clapp himself liked beer, and was of the opinion that you could not propitiate a German aristocrat with cocoa. Meanwhile, he felt in a trouser pocket, and produced three pennies and a sixpence.

He twinkled at George.

“ Three pence, Mr. George Gregson. And sixpence extra.”

“ Ooo, thank you, Mr. Clapp.”

“ We will say nothing about it. And, George, let us say nothing about your parade with Mr. Schultze. We just met him, you know, and were kind to him.”

George blinked. He was wanting to run out and spend that sixpence. He had overheard the argument about the beer and he did understand that the less you said to Mrs. Clapp about things the more peaceful life could be.

“ I won’t, sir.”

“ Well, run along.”

George dashed out, put on his overcoat and cap, and found himself in Sussex Terrace. The door of No.1 had just closed, and standing on the doorstep was a little girl with bright dark eyes.

George paused, stared, and fell in love, utterly and heroically at first sight.

Chapter 8

HAD George Gregson been ten years older, some shock of self-conscious shyness might have sent them off, eyes front and head in air, but George, the small boy, looked, loved and lingered. The girl was smoothing on a pair of new woollen gloves, and giving all her attention to the business, or so it appeared. No woman, even at the age of twelve, should show herself too conscious of a conquest. Moreover, John Hyde's small daughter was feeling sensitive about people and things, and in a mood to shrink from human contacts. The pangs of soul-growth are vivid and real, little scorching and painful flames, like some old pious picture in which the human heart is shown burning upon an altar.

George lingered, looked, and uttered the brave and fatal words.

“Are you going for a walk?”

The girl's dark eyes met his, but only for a moment.

“I might be.”

Why the equivocation? What was a doorstep but a prelude to progress? Ann Hyde, watching the pair from behind a curtain was moved to tender laughter.

“ May I walk with you ? I — I’d like to.”

Rachel still smoothed at her gloves. They were cheap gloves, and the finger-stalls seemed to end in superfluous blobs.

“ Where are you going ? ”

“ Anywhere.” said George.

“ Do you know anywhere ? ”

“ Highbury Fields. And there’s Upper Street, and the shops. I’ve got sixpence.”

It was not meant as a bribe, and she did not take it as such. She looked again at his eager, freckled face and was warmed by it. Life had been so cold and sneery, and to be looked at as George looked at her was heart’s-ease.

She said, “ I haven’t been in Highbury Fields. Are they real fields ? ”

“ Not quite, but there’s grass and trees.”

“ Oh, trees.”

“ Yes, not very big ones,” George had to confess, remembering at the same moment that his favourite cake-shop overlooked the Fields, a recent importation useful to new red villadom, but rather shocking to the austere old Dickens houses. They sold halfpenny rock-cakes there, and bars of chocolate and bulls-eyes. George did not confess

to the shop. He kept it in reserve.

“ Let’s go and walk in the fields.”

George became a little “ Gallant ” conscious of panache, a small D’aryson eager to try his sword on some interfering foe. He felt equal to meeting the Yarbury lads and flouting them, but he was spared that peril on this particular day. He walked proudly beside his lady. He led her down Allardyce Road, and into the Canonbury Road, and so to Highbury Corner. There was much traffic here, and George the man dared to be responsible for Dark Eyes’ safety.

He put out a hand.

“ I’ve got to take you across safely.”

She accepted the hand.

“ Now,” said George, “ before that bus comes along.”

They scampered over, hand in hand, and arriving at the opposite pavement, looked at each other and laughed. Rachel’s red lips seemed to curl back like petals, and her white teeth showed. There was more colour in her cheeks, and George thought her a fairy creature.

“ What’s your name ? Mine’s George.”

“ Rachel.”

“ That comes out of the Bible. I know your other name, it’s Hyde.”

“ What’s yours ? ”

“ Gregson. My father’s a doctor, and awfully clever.”

Her lashes flickered. George was on delicate ground, and she was sensitive about fathers.

“ Is this Highbury Fields ? ”

“ Yes, in by this gateway. Let’s go along by the houses first. I’m afraid there are no leaves on the trees.”

To an aesthetic person, Highbury Fields might have appeared as acres of municipally dressed dreadfulness. The windows of the Georgian houses gazed with pale scorn upon the ugly iron railings, the gravel paths, and the inspired dreariness of the rows of young trees and shrubs. Why iron railings ? Rachel asked that question of herself and of George.

“ Why do they put railings round things ? ”

George was posed.

“ To keep people out.”

“ But they let them in. It seems silly.”

“ They might cut the trees down.”

“ When ? ”

“ Oh, at night, when the gardeners weren’t about.”

George may have been nearer the truth than he knew. Spiked iron railings seem to be in the English tradition,

a symbol of property, and a proof that the Saxon is a thief. We may be very smug in our self-conceit, and make rhymes about Taffy the Welshman, and prate of honesty being the best policy. So it may be, when protected with spiked iron railings, and the Victorians could be tough realists behind all their Sabbath sentiment, and know that honesty is a quality that has to be safeguarded by the police.

“I think it’s silly.” said Rachel.

George was not quite so sure. Did not the gardens of Royal Terrace possess railings? Even his father, who was the most generous of men, believed in railings. It might be a question of more education, and a further dissemination of ownership, but so long as someone had something which someone else had not, railings would be necessary. The someone else might be able to produce quite a number of arguments in favour of plunder. The other fellow was fair game, especially if he happened to be born clever and strong and enterprising. He and his damned railings provoked envy.

Maybe, George thought that the subject needed changing. His Fairy did not approve of railings; perhaps she would approve of his shop window. One of the old houses had had its ground floor transformed into a glass front, a note of

discord in the austere rhythm of the long terrace. Old green coach-house doors did not matter, but a shop window ! Inevitable desecration ! But George was a healthy child, and in love, and rock-cakes and strawberry ices and chocolate were wholesome realities.

He led his lady to the window. It was Saturday, and Saturday was always a rock-cake day, but George did remind himself that just because he liked a thing it might not be liked by other people. He had a hand in his pocket, and his hand clasped Mr. Clapp's sixpence. Christmas presents were forgotten in the rush of romance.

“ Do you like rock-cakes ? ”

Rachel was not a greedy child, but she had been starved of sweet things, and sweets tempted her more than crinkled yellow cakes speckled with currants.

“ Yes, but —— ”

“ Toffee ? ” said George.

“ Yes, but —— ”

“ Chocolates ? ”

He had touched the heart, or was it the stomach or his Eve ? She confessed to a passion for chocolates, the ones with cream inside.

“ I'll buy you some,” said George.

“ Oh, no, you mustn't ! ”

“ Come inside and look.”

George walked like a lordling with her into the shop, for he was the King of Ninepence. Would his lady choose the provocation of her particular passion ? Rachel looked at the glass jars and the trays. There were chocolates of various sorts, fruit-drops, peppermints, fondants, nougat, Turkish Delight, caramels. The chocolates were variously priced, and Rachel pointed a gloved finger at the cheapest brand.

“ Those look rather nice.”

George addressed the girl behind the counter.

“ I'll have a quarter of a pound of those, please.”

“ Yes, dear.” said the girl.

George was piqued. Dear, indeed ! He was not old enough to say, “ Damn it, woman, keep your dears to yourself. I'm a grown up man.”

“ Got any rock-cakes ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ I'll have two.”

“ In separate bags ? ”

“ What, the cakes ? ”

“ No, the cakes and the chocolates ? ”

Was she trying to be funny ? George thought her a very silly young woman. And she wore spectacles.

“ Of course, in separate bags.”

He received his chocolates and his cakes, and with sudden shyness he pushed the bag of chocolates at Rachel.

“ You take them.”

“ No, you mustn't. They're yours.”

“ No, it's a present. Let's go and find a seat.”

They found a seat under a leafless chestnut tree. George placed his bag on the seat, and she did the same.

“ You choose,” said George.

“ No, you must choose first.”

“ That wouldn't be gentlemanly.”

She glimmered her eyes at him, dipped into the bag, and produced a chocolate. She slipped it between her lips, and George watched her. Was it good ? It was good.

“ Then, I'll have one.”

“ I'll choose you one.”

She made a very solemn business of it.

“ Shut your eyes and open your mouth.”

George obeyed her. She had taken off her glove, and her fingertips touched his lips.

“ It's a lovely one,” said George.

II

THE Germans are such a thorough people that their very thoroughness makes them suspect to the more easy-going and playful of the human race. To be so thorough in lying and in bad faith that the very un-subtlety of it makes the thing ridiculous and perhaps terrible, may not dawn upon the Tueton and his neighbours until the jackboot is crushing somebody else's toes. A sort of cruel low cunning may give an air of cleverness to the process. The official German appears to be a person without intuition or playfulness. He just puts his big foot upon the human ant-heap, and leaves artistry to the Jews.

Now, Mr. Josiah Wedgewood Clapp was not a Jew, but he was an artist, a playful creature who could cut imaginative capers, and when Mr. Schultze rang the bell of No. 2 Sussex Terrace, and was admitted by Ellen, Mr. Clapp was in the Rookery, and observing life through the glass panel of the door. The gas jet in the hall was at its brightest, and displayed to Mr. Clapp the cunning of costume, but so obviously so that Mr. Clapp chuckled. Herr Schultze was disguised as the provincial, floridly Bavarian even as to

his tie. No Prussian austerity here, no trim tunic, no sleek trousers. Herr Schultze was a flaunting, sloppy, middle-class figure, and again Mr. Clapp chuckled.

“Shades of Hamlet, I smell a rat behind the arras.”

George perked up. George was supposed to be translating Caesar at his simplest. What funny things Mr. Clapp did say ! But Mr. Clapp was giving his tie a pull, and ruffling his hair.

“Music, George, art, Heidleberg, Heine, if you like. Germania twangs the lyre. Mr. Schultze has arrived. Let us go forth and make music.”

The symposium was to be held in Mr. Clapp's drawing room. Mr. Clapp emerged from the Rookery and greeted Herr Schultze with large effusiveness.

“So glad to see you ; so good of you to come. Shall we go upstairs ? Permit me to lead the way.”

George had been told to follow. Mr. Clapp was floundering upwards, talking all the time about Schubert and Schumann, but to George it appeared that Herr Schultze was more interested in other things. He mounted the stairs slowly, and his head kept giving little jerks, up and down and sideways. Was Mr. Schultze interested in an English house, and wanted to see just how the English arranged

their doors and windows ? It could not have occurred to George that No. 2 Sussex Terrace might assume to be a replica of No. 1, and that Otto Schultze's interest was in reconnoitring.

They arrived at the first floor landing, and George saw his German friend look upwards.

" Your house very high is."

Mr. Clapp turned and beamed on him.

" Story after story. Almost Arabian Nights. Do you not build like that in Munich ? "

" Ach - zo. In Munich one many stairs climbs."

" My dear sir, an attic is nearer heaven."

Mrs. Clapp was waiting for them, the lady of the house enthroned beside the fire, and looking as German as her Widowed Queen. Mrs. Clapp was quite unsubtle. Her blobbed blue eyes saw much and nothing. She was a creature of surfaces, prejudices, moral convictions. She had been prejudiced against Herr Schultze, deeming him to be some disreputable Bohemian whom her silly Wedgewood had gathered from the hedgerows, but Herr Schultze surprised her. He put his heels together, and bowed over her hand ; he raised her hand and saluted it. How very foreign and absurd ! But Mrs. Clapp rather liked it. And she liked

blonde young men with bold staring blue eyes and curly hair and good figures. Wedgewood had none of those qualities.

Herr Schultze expressed his gratitude to the lady. How charming was his broken English ! Almost, Mrs. Clapp simpered. Quite a distinguished young man, in spite of his tie. After all, poor Wedgewood had discovered a gentleman. George stared open mouthed at the transfigured Charlotte, the gracious, regal little middle-class hen.

“ Shall we take refreshment before the music, Wedgewood ? ”

“ Just as you please, my dear.”

“ Just as Herr Schultze pleases.”

Herr Schultze bowed and smiled.

“ My kind hostess — refreshment is.”

“ We English take tea, Herr Schultze, but I understand that in Germany you drink beer.”

George, glancing at Mr. Clapp, saw naughtiness and an almost exclamatory joy behind Mr. Clapp's spectacles.

“ The English beer, like the English kindness, very good is.”

“ Wedgewood,” said Mrs. Clapp, “ ring the bell, and tell Ellen to bring up two bottles of ale.”

Mr. Clapp smothered a guffaw. Why did ale always sound more refined than beer ?

“ Two bottles, my dear ? ”

“ Ah, well, say three, Wedgewood.”

Mr. Clapp had to have his joke.

“ Music, Herr Schultze, harmony ! Hark, hark, the lark, and the music of the glasses ! ”

Cakes and ale were an old English combination and George was allowed one slice of cake before being sent aleless to bed. Mrs. Clapp was responsible for his dismissal, and though Georgie protested that it was only half past eight, Mrs. Clapp would not relent. “ Little boys should be in bed.” Charlotte Clapp found silent, staring children embarrassing, for though she was not sensitive to adult criticism, she did divine the horrible candour of childhood. George felt insulted. Little boy indeed ! When he was playing Ivanhoe to himself, and Rachel had taken the part of Rowena ! He glanced at Mr. Clapp, and at Herr Schultze, but Mr. Clapp just winked at him, and Herr Schultze did not intervene or appeal for him to the lady.

George walked haughtily to the door. Little boy indeed !

“ George,” said Mrs. Clapp sharply, “ say goodnight properly, and like a little gentleman.”

Why could not the woman leave that wretched diminutive out of things ? George faced about, and produced a dignity that was almost ironic.

“ Goodnight, Mrs. Clapp, goodnight Mr. Schultze.”

“ Herr Schultze.” snapped the lady.

“ Goodnight, Mr. Clapp.”

“ Goodnight, Wellington.”

Now, what had Mr. Clapp meant by that ? George closed the door, stood reflecting, and then spread thumb and fingers at the invisible lady. Did the Great Duke ever do that to Napoleon ? Yes, perhaps in the spirit, when the English squares were spoiling the Ogre’s game at Waterloo.

George undressed, turned out the gas, and got into bed, but he had left the door open. Sounds of music came up to him, two male voices singing one of Schubert’s songs. Mr. Clapp was at the piano, and rolling to and fro on the stool, with deep base emotion welling out of him. Herr Schultze sang tenor, standing behind Mr. Clapp’s stool, and keeping an eye on the lady. Mrs. Clapp sat like a satisfied hen with a clutch of eggs under her.

There were two more songs by the gentlemen and then a burst of conversation. Herr Schultze’s voice sounded dominant in broken English. He seemed to be asking

somebody for something. Then, there was a tinkling on the piano, and Mrs. Clapp began to trill like a canary. She sang "Juanita" and it was followed by hand-clapping, and more broken English from Mr. Schultze. He appeared to be congratulating the lady on her voice, and pressing her to sing again. Mrs. Clapp did sing again. She gave to the night "She Wore A Wreath of Roses" and for some reason or other George giggled. Roses soused in vinegar! What a funny world it was!

III

HERR OTTO SCHULTZ bowed over the lady's hand.

"A thousand thanks, madam. I home happy go, and full of music."

Mrs. Clapp simpered.

"You must come again."

"That will delightful be."

"Wedgewood," said the lady, "you will see Herr Schultze to the door."

Both Mr. Clapp and Herr Otto were full of beer as well as harmony, and Mr. Clapp insisted upon helping Herr Schultze on with his coat.

"You must come again, my dear fellow."

Herr Otto smiled his most brilliant smile.

"To a poor student of the language you most kind are."

"Fudge!" said Mr. Clapp to himself, and accompanied Herr Otto to the front door.

It was a mild night, and Mr. Clapp walked out onto the pavement, and surveyed the stars.

"Like golden rain, sir, golden rain. What's that, a tree?"

"A tree with yellow flowers."

"Ah, of course, laburnum. I will stroll with you a little way. Yes, leave the door open. Tra-la. Wine, women, and song!"

Mr. Clapp began to sing. Did the fat fool get drunk so easily on a couple of glasses of beer?

Herr Schultze took Mr. Clapp's arm, and he also began to sing. They walked along Sussex Terrace in the wrong direction, came to a blind end, turned, and strolled back.

"Houses, houses," said Herr Schultze, "they cause me to wonder, always. Who in them lives? It is fascinating, the curiosity, what?"

"I agree, my dear fellow, I agree."

"Your house, it so homely is. And your charming Frau."

"Yes, very homely." said Mr. Clapp.

"Can I, in English count. Three, two, one."

"Quite right, my dear fellow."

"In three who lives?"

"A stockbroker of the name of Hunt."

"Two is Clapp. I clap. That is applause, hein?"

"Splendid, my dear fellow."

Mr. Clapp laughed heartily.

"And in one, who?"

"Ah, in one? You have me! I do not know the fellow's name. I understand he is a dry-goods merchant."

Herr Schultze stiffened.

"What is that?"

"A fellow who puts sawdust in the sugar." And again Mr. Clapp laughed and thumped Herr Schultze in the back.

"Well, here we are at the corner. Must be getting home. Door open. Bootiful night, my dear fellow. Hark, hark, the lark!"

Herr Schultze wrung Mr. Clapp's hand.

"A most delightful evening, Herr Clapp."

"Goodnight, my dear fellow. We will repeat the symposium."

Herr Schultze walked off round the corner, and Mr. Clapp,

suddenly solemn and sedate, strolled back to his own doorstep and lingered there.

“ So, you want to find out who lives in No. 1, do you, my friend ! Now, why ? ”

Chapter 9

GEORGE GREGSON could hear Mrs. Clapp's voice in the distance flowing on and on like *The Shining River* she sometimes sang about.

Mrs. Clapp had begun by asking the returning husband an awkward question.

"Was that you singing in the street, Wedgewood?"

"Yes, my dear, I'm afraid it was."

"Disgraceful!"

"My dear, Herr Schultze and I were walking in Vienna. It was the good bee — a'hem, ale."

"You drank too much, Wedgewood."

"I drank no more than Herr Schultze did. In fact, not as much."

"Herr Schultze is a German, and young. You will pay for the beer, Wedgewood. I will not take it out of the housekeeping money."

"With pleasure, my dear. Do you know I wondered tonight, why ——"

"You wondered what, Wedgewood?"

Mr. Clapp began to fill a pipe. He sat down in front of the fire, and kicked off his slippers.

“ Never mind, Charlotte. It was not your fault.

Obfuscated sentiment, the sex urge. Marvellous ! Vienna Nights. And the Danube isn't blue really. Strauss only saw it blue when he was in love —— ”

“ What are you talking about, Wedgewood ? ”

“ Just nonsense, my dear. There is escape in nonsense. Excuse me, a hiccough.”

“ Wedgewood, you have had too much ale.”

“ Why not too much music ? Drink to me only with thine eyes, and pledge me the port in mine ! Tra - la. But let us be serious.”

“ I agree,” said the lady, “ at your age.”

“ Beware of falling on thin ice, Charlotte. I wish you would call on No. 1.”

“ I have.”

“ You have ? ”

“ An impossible house. No one answered the bell.”

“ Perhaps no one was at home.”

Mrs. Clapp looked at him with suspicion. Like many good women she was full of suspicion.

“ And why, are you so eager for me to call ? ”

“ Just for the same reason, Charlotte.”

“ What reason ? ”

“ Your reason, my dear.”

“ Kindness of heart.”

“ Oh, no, Charlotte, just rank, vulgar curiosity.”

Mr. Clapp heard much more on the subject during the business of going to bed, and so did George. Why had Mr. Clapp married Mrs. Clapp ? How was it that his own mother never talked to his father as Mrs. Clapp talked to poor Mr. Clapp ? Well, of course, everything was different at home. His father was rather like Mr. Clapp in his playfulness, and generosity, but, of course, ever so much handsomer, and his mother was not in the least like Mrs. Clapp, save that she was fair. George’s mother had a round and rosy face, with a little blunt nose and a rather large and kissable mouth, a jocund, happy face. Well, George could suppose that the differences were due to his mother.

He turned over with a sigh, and let himself imagine Rachel captured by savages, and he, a gallant fellow, with a cutlass and pistols, leaping a’shore and leading his Jack Tars to the rescue. It was a naval occasion. George had rather exhausted the tournament business, and had spitted the younger Yarbury so often with his spear, while Rachel looked on from a flowery throne, that he sought now scenes for the dramatization of his passion. He had cut off the

head of the savage chief, taken the beloved heroine in his arms, and was carrying her to the boat, where he fell asleep.

Mr. Clapp lay awake much longer than George. He knew of only one method of silencing Charlotte, and he had employed it, and was suffering from the sadness and flacidity that follows the perfunctory performance of the marital act. Mrs. Clapp was comfortably assuaged and asleep, and snoring gently and Mr. Clapp escaped into other dimensions. He was painting a picture by some southern sea, with a dark damsel lying on the yellow sand beside him, a silent and mysterious damask rose of a girl who did not nag. But, come, come, this was too Byronian ! It behoved him to concentrate and solace himself with more real problems. Now, why was that German so interested in No. 1 Sussex Terrace, and what did the rather mysterious Mr. Hyde do in that strangely secretive house ?

II

MORE fog. Ann Hyde was sitting at her Bluebeard's Window, and it was cold up there, though she wore mittens and a shawl. Rachel had gone to school, for her mother had

discovered a school for girls in Highbury Grove where day-pupils were taken and the fees were small. It was not a very good school, rather musty and dusty, but it would have to serve until such a time as John's inventive dream came true, if it ever came true.

Rachel had told her mother about Georgie Gregson. And could she ask George in to tea? George had given her chocolates, and George was good for Rachel's happiness. Ann Hyde had been one of a family of seven, and she did realise that Rachel must be a lonely child. The nice boy next door could be regarded as the most innocent of visitors, and his coming to tea need not involve them in any social commitments with the Clapp household.

"If you see him, ask him for next Saturday, darling."

"Oh, thank you, mother. Will there be cake?"

"Perhaps. Does George like cake?"

What a question to ask!

"Yes, rock-cakes."

"I think we can manage rock-cakes."

Yes, she could make them herself.

Ann Hyde was darning a hole in one of her daughter's stockings when she heard a sound that made her lay her work aside, and sit listening. A band had begun to play

down below there in the fog. It was not a very good band, but brassy and discordant with some big wind instrument going umph-umph at the back and the bottom of the melody. Also, there was much drum, and a cornet that seemed to be feeling the fog. Mrs. Hyde rose and put her face close to the window, but the yellow haze hid the performers. Now, what kind of itinerant band could this be on such a day, muffling itself in blankets of fog ? A German band ? Ann Hyde put a hand to her cheek, and her face looked pinched. A flute shrilled out suddenly and picked out the melody, like some slender animal wailing in a dark forest, while the big brazen beast grunted and moored.

Just coincidence ! But was it ? Nothing that came out of Germany could be without significance, and sinister significance for those who dwelt in No. 1 Sussex Terrace. Ann Hyde went quickly to the door, opened it, and crossed the landing.

“ John.”

“ Hallo.”

“ Come here, dear.”

That particular door opened. She saw her husband in his shirt sleeves.

“ What’s wrong, Nan ? ”

"Listen. Can you hear?"

She saw her husband's very black brows draw together.

"What's that?"

"A band playing in the street."

"A band!"

They looked at each other like two tragic people in a tower listening to the sounds of armed men muttering and gathering in the outer darkness. Ann Hyde saw her husband's eyes grow fierce.

"I should know the brand! Blood and iron out of Germany. I had better go and look."

He had turned back into the work-room for his coat, while she stood hesitant, her hand to her cheek.

"John."

"Yes?"

"Is it wise for you to go out?"

"Why not? I'd like to have a look at the gentlemen."

"But, supposing, that is what they want?"

"You mean?"

"To make sure that we live here."

He was buttoning up his coat.

"Well, if it is the Bergman gang, they must have smelt us out, and if that's so, my taking a look at them won't matter.

I ought to know the genuine article."

"Then, put on your hat and overcoat."

"Of course. I'm just going to the post. Come down and let me out and lock the door after me. By the way, where's Rachel?"

"She may be back any minute."

"Well, there's no danger in that. Now, for a little scouting."

He locked the workshop door, and they went down the stairs together.

"Ought we to warn Uncle James?"

"No, I don't think so. You can, if you like, while I'm out. He can get out his nice little Colt, and sit upstairs. Uncle Jim is quite ready to deal with any hypothetical burglar. I think he'd like to give Bismarck one in the tummy."

The hall was very dark because of the fog, and Hyde lit the gas jet before putting on his hat and overcoat. There was something in the right hand pocket, a brass knuckle-duster, and he slipped his fingers into it.

"I'll open the door. Keep behind it."

He slipped the bolts back carefully, and turning the key, swung the door open, and stepping out into the fog, drew the door to after him. The band was still in full blast.

The musicians were grouped in the roadway opposite the windows of No. 2, half a dozen dim figures like grey ghosts in a world of vapour. Hyde paused for a moment on the doorstep, and then moved towards the group of musicians. A lamp post rose here from the edge of the pavement, and Hyde was close to it before he became aware of the child leaning against the post with one arm round it.

“Hallo, Daddy.”

“Hallo, young woman ! What are you doing here ? ”

“Just listening to the band.”

Hyde slipped the knuckle-duster off his hand, and leaving the thing in his overcoat pocket, took his daughter's hand.

“Like to present them with twopence ? That's about all they are worth.”

“Yes, Daddy.”

His left hand found some coppers.

“Here you are. Come along.”

The six men in their peaked caps and shabby blue coats appeared to be absorbed in making music. Hyde glanced at their faces. They looked sufficiently German to satisfy casual suspicion. One fat old fellow with distended cheeks and huge and flopping moustacios, who was blowing

away at the huge brass instrument, raised his eyes from the music-card that was clipped to his trumpet, and looked mildly at Hyde and the girl.

“Thanks for the music. Now then, young woman.”

Rachel held out her two pennies, and the fat old man ceased blowing, raised a hand and lifted his cap. He held out the cap, and Rachel dropped the coppers into it.

“Tanks, liddle lady, tanks, mein herr.”

Hyde smiled and nodded. He cast a seemingly friendly and casual glance over the circle of faces. One young fellow continued to play sedulously upon his flute, as though music was more to him than Mamon.

Hyde and Rachel moved away.

“Five minutes quick walk, young woman.”

But memories had been provoked by the face of the flute-player. Hyde had a feeling that he had seen the fellow before.

III

HERR OTTO SCHULTZE, having spent half an hour arguing in private with a recalcitrant and over timid Mr. Miller, sat down sideways on Mr. Miller's desk, and held a fist within

a few inches of his employer's fleshy nose. Mr. Miller's bulging eyes squinted at it through their convex lenses. He was perspiring, and his thin neat plaster of carefully oiled hair glistened distressfully.

“ But my dear baron —— ”

“ Shut up, you fool ; I know the office is supposed to be empty, but that abortion of a Schmidt doesn't like me. I have caught him sneaking back more than once, pretending he has forgotten something.”

Mr. Miller took off his glasses and polished them, as though glad to have something to do with his hands.

“ I cannot stand for violence, Herr Schultze.”

“ Violence ! What is violence ? Is not commerce, war of another kind ? We Germans get what we want.”

“ But, surely, it is possible to use money ? ”

“ I've told you we offered the fellow ten thousand marks for his work. He would not sell. He got out of the country before we could nab him.”

Mr. Miller, having gained time to confront this alarming situation, readjusted his spectacles, and folded his hands over a comfortable little paunch. Dear God, but the baron was a breath-taking person ! Mr. Miller had not envisaged any such violent adventures when he had agreed to act as

the London agent of Bergman & Co — he was in debt to Bergman & Co. It was all very well for the baron and his monstrously potent Uncle to employ Bismarckian methods in private affairs. Mr. Miller had become mock-English, even to the point of wearing a yachting cap and a reefer jacket, and sailing a boat in the Thames estuary when the tide permitted him to get her afloat. Mr. Miller travelled daily from Southend on Sea. He had a house on the cliff, a pleasant little white house with a green verandah, a good tempered wife and two daughters. Mr. Miller was finding life very comfortable ; he liked his garden and his Sunday dinner, and sailing his boat up to Leigh and Canvey Island, or round the end of Southend pier. He did not welcome earthquakes and explosions, and the truculent ruthlessness of which Herr Schultze and his alarming potentate of an uncle seemed capable. Mr. Miller preferred more legitimate ways of persuading an intractable fellow citizen to do business.

“ May I remind you, Herr Schultze, that I have lived in this country for fifteen years, and that I know more about it —— ”

“ And become soft, like the English.”

“ The English are not soft, my friend. May I suggest that

this man Hyde may be open to persuasion.”

“ He stole some of our secret plans.”

“ Is that really so ? ”

Herr Otto, sitting, hands on hips, smiled at this poor, frightened sheep.

“ We would swear it in a court of law. We would produce witnesses. We would say ‘ Does one pay a man for that which he has stolen ? ’ No, we take back our own, by force, if needs be. We should have a good case, Miller, if it came into court.”

“ But, my dear baron ! ”

“ What a head you have ! Meanwhile, the secret would be safe in Germany. The English lawyers could talk their tongues out.”

“ And you, too, would be safe in Germany.”

“ Probably.”

“ And I, should be left with the baby, as the English put it.”

“ You sheep’s head, your name need never be mentioned. You could swear that you did not know.”

Even the mild Mr. Miller began to simmer.

“ I do not like your insults, baron. Would not the police discover, not only that you had worked in my office, but

that I am the Bergman representative ? Of course they would. I will have nothing to do with violence. Be sensible, and offer this man five thousand pounds."

" That would be your business."

" No. I will not act as an intermediary when ugly methods have been hinted at. I refuse to."

Herr Schultze scowled at him.

" Oh, very well. Leave it to us. But keep your flabby mouth shut. How much do you owe our firm ? A largish sum, what ! And, no more business. I advise you to say nothing, know nothing."

Mr. Miller nodded his head emphatically.

" Most certainly I shall know nothing."

Mr. Miller, as an exporter and foreign merchant, had had to deal with gentlemen and traders of all nations, and Mr. Miller had discovered that some gentlemen had short memories, particularly German gentlemen. If you were a very elevated person, it was beneath you to remember that which it was more convenient to forget. Only grocers and slaves could be expected to be literal. Mr. Miller was feeling angry with himself. He had been fooled by old Bergman, the iron king, that bland and bearded patriarch who modeled himself on the good old Kaiser, God, the Holy

Book and the Christmas Tree, and was a Mongol in his business methods. Mr. Miller had become English, though he had not confessed to his sentimental Frau that he preferred England to Germany, and the English easiness to a thoroughness that trod ruthlessly upon other people's toes. Mr. Miller was the old Germany ; he did his business with reasonable honesty, and liked his music and his pipe and his beer, and Golthe & Schiller & William Shakespeare, and his dog and his garden. Provided that you had sufficient money, why not let well alone ? Why become a sort of Assyrian bull, blundering and snorting about the world, and getting yourself hated ? This modern Germany was very fierce and very foolish.

Mr. Miller travelled homewards from Fenchurch Street, seeing Stepney & Plaistow and the Hams wallowing dimly in fog. He was worried and depressed. He did not believe that Herr Otto Schultze had been telling the truth. This invention, whatever it was, had not been stolen. Oh, no, Bergman & Co. meant to do the stealing, for the sake of the Fatherland. There could be too much Fatherland. Mr. Miller was sorry that he had allowed himself to get mixed up in the business. One should not allow oneself to drift into debt with super-patriots like old Bergman and his

implacable nephew.

IV

HERR SCHULTZ walked home in the fog. He was feeling savage both with the situation and Mr. Miller. They had been mistaken in Miller, a German who had grown soft in England, and who appeared to have absorbed England's silly humanitarianism. Thrice damned humbugs, the English ! They had purloined a large portion of the earth, and they exported missionaries and crude spirit, and supported the opium trade, and went all black and smug on Sunday. Even the English dogs were slobbering, silly beasts. A large and excited collie, bouncing down Ellgood Terrace, and full of the joy of being out, attempted to display a sudden blundering friendliness towards Herr Schultze. Herr Schultze cursed it, pushed the dog off and swung a foot. The collie yelped and went off growling.

It's owner turned across the foggy road to investigate and to protest.

“ What did you do to my dog ? ”

Herr Schultze showed his canine fangs.

“ You go to the devil ! ”

"After you, sir, I think," said the ironic owner, and Herr Schultze passed on.

He banged the door of No. 9, and climbing the stairs, found friend Adolph warming his hands at the fire.

"Hallo, feeling the cold, brother?"

"It is a cold business playing on the flute."

"Any news?"

Herr Adler grinned.

"Why, yes. The fellow has a small daughter. He came out and gave her twopence to present to us."

"What munificence! It is ——?"

"Herr Hyde, most certainly. He seems very fond of the daughter. Isn't there an idea in that?"

"How?"

"If we purloined the child, wouldn't that put us in a very good position for doing business? Something to bargain with."

"Great God!" said Herr Otto, "You're not such a fool as you pretend to be. It's an idea."

Chapter 10

DR. GREGSON was having breakfast, and reading a letter from George to his mother which Mary Gregson had passed to her husband. There was no fog over the Thames Estuary. The lace curtains of No.11 Royal Terrace were lit by winter sunlight, and the hollies in the shrubbery between Royal Terrace and the sea were brilliantly berried and darkly glistening. Dr. Gregson, helping himself to marmalade, smiled over his son's letter. Dr. Gregson was a thick-set, comely man, with a fine head, a fresh colour, English blue eyes, and a little black Spanish beard cut to a point. He wore the beard as a protection against the bitter northeast winds he had to face in an open dog-cart.

"It's a nice, ingenuous child. Let's see, last year it was Ethel; now it's Rachel. I hope he doesn't fall asleep in church and loudly kiss dream faces."

"Would it matter?" asked his wife.

"Not in the least, though it might shock some of the old tabbies. Strange, how the dear spinsters want to kiss small boys who don't welcome the attention."

"Would you?"

"Who's being cynical now? By the way, what am I giving

Georgie for Christmas ? ”

“ That fort or castle in Berrenger’s window.”

“ Complete with guns ! The child is very military minded. Will he be a healer or a killer ? ”

“ Don’t some doctors, dear, belong to the latter class ? ”

“ Oh, Mary ! ”

Someone passed the windows, turned in between the little gardens and rang the bell of No. 11. Eliza, the cook, answered the bell and brought in a letter. Dr. Gregson opened it, and glancing at it somewhat perfunctorily, told Eliza to tell the messenger that he would call to see Mr. Miller about eleven o’clock. Dr. Gregson was in a playful mood, perhaps because he had a heavy day before him ; his vitality showed in his high colour and his sleek black hair ; he liked hard work, a strange obsession !

“ Oh, just Miller of Sea View. You had better treasure your son’s letter. I wonder if falling in love at his age is a good symptom ? ”

“ Isn’t it normal ? ”

“ I suppose so. Anyhow, he does not chalk it up on people’s front doors and gates.”

“ Did you ? ”

“ Once, and got tanned for it. My grandfather’s freshly

painted front gate. And who do you think the object was ? ”

“ Better draw a veil over such indiscretions, Gavin.”

“ Well, as a matter of fact it was Nellie, the under-housemaid ! Which shows how undeveloped one’s perceptions can be ! ”

At nine o’clock Dr. Gregson walked briskly along the terrace and past the Royal Hotel to the house at the end of the High Street where his surgery and dispensary dwelt. He had his surgery patients to see.

At half past nine his dark blue dogcart with Polly the bay between the shafts, drew up outside. Southend could set its clock by Dr. Gregson and his equipage. The girls dressing the windows of Mr. Manser’s millining shop, saw Dr. Gregson appear and climb up beside Myall the groom. Most young women thought Dr. Gregson a very handsome man, which he was, and a top-hat suited him.

“ Sea View ” was a little, low, white house with a green veranda, standing near the flagstaff on the cliff. Its windows looked out over a small lawn and a hedge of euonymus to the estuary, and the distant hills of Kent. It was said of Dr. Gregson that he was out of his dogcart and up your stairs before you could say, “ Jack Robinson ”, and Mrs. Miller, who had been watching for the doctor, met him

as he was pulling his gloves off in the hall. Dr. Gregson did not wait upon bells and ceremony ; his time was precious, and affectations and genteel humbug annoyed him.

“ Good morning, Mrs. Miller. Your husband in bed ? ”

“ Yes, doctor. I’m afraid it’s sciatica.”

“ A ready made diagnosis for me, what ! Well, I’ll go up.”

And up he went, two steps at a time, leaving the lady’s fat formalism perdu in the passage. Mrs. Miller was large and languid and glutinously loquacious, one of those women who use ten words when one would suffice, and who like to sit down on a subject like a hen on a dozen eggs.

Dr. Gregson took his hat with him. Had he paused to hang up his hat, Mrs. Miller would have had her opportunity and that was not in the day’s curriculum. Mr. Miller’s door flew open, letting in this vivid, cheerful physician.

“ Well, my friend, what’s the trouble.”

Mr. Miller was lying in bed with the clothes pulled up to his chin. He looked rather like a large baby, with bulging blue eyes, and a thin crop of immature hair.

“ Sciatica, doctor, I’m afraid.”

“ I’m sorry. Ever had it before ? ”

“ No.”

Dr. Gregson smiled upon him and sat down beside the bed, hanging his hat informally on one of the brass knobs. Now, how did Mr. Miller know it was sciatica ? Patients might be allowed to jump at conclusions, but a doctor — never. That easy path could lead to disaster and law-suits. Dr. Gregson might be a playful person, but as a physician he took nothing for granted.

He began to catechise his patient as to the incidence, possible cause, and the symptoms of the affliction. Mr. Miller asserted that he believed that he had taken a chill waiting for his train, or sitting during the fog in an unheated carriage. The foot-warmer had been stone cold. Disgraceful ! As to the pain Mr. Miller described it as excruciating and constant, and though he pulled grimaces, Dr. Gregson was a little puzzled.

“ Now, let’s have a look at you.”

“ Please shut the window, doctor ; the slightest chill makes the pain worse.”

Dr. Gregson shut the window, drew back the bed-clothes, and told Mr. Miller to lie on his stomach. Mr. Miller did so, haltingly and with groanings. Dr. Gregson laid his hand on the back of Mr. Miller’s thigh, and Mr. Miller said “ Ouch ! Your hand’s like ice, doctor.” Gregson apologised,

and went to warm his hands at the bedroom fire.

“ Keep you awake at night ? ”

“ I can hardly sleep, doctor.”

Dr. Gregson made his examination, and Mr. Miller did a great deal of wincing and exclaiming. The doctor was sympathetic. Mr. Miller must stay in bed, and he would prescribe an anodyne for the pain. Then, Dr. Gregson having made a few cheerful remarks about the weather and the situation in Egypt, and the Miller daughters, retrieved his hat from the bedpost and went downstairs.

Mrs. Miller was waiting for him. She had many questions to ask, and so had Dr. Gregson.

“ Does the pain keep your husband awake at night ? ”

“ Oh, no, doctor ; that is one mercy. He sleeps like a top.”

Dr. Gregson left the house, smiling to himself, and reflecting upon certain discrepancies. Why had Mr. Miller chosen sciatica, and why was he exaggerating all his symptoms ?

“ I'll give him a good blistering in a day or two. That may persuade him to feel better.”

Mrs. Miller had gone upstairs to her husband.

“ What does the doctor say about me ? ”

“ You may have to stay in bed for a month.”

Mr. Miller sighed contentedly. He did not want to go to London while Bergman & Co. were doing business of their own.

II

MR. GOLDSTEIN was in charge of the affairs of Messrs. Miller & Co. while the principal was indisposed, and when Herr Schultze, having absented himself for a whole day, strolled into the office half an hour late, Mr. Goldstein was waiting for him. The Jew did not like the Prussian ; there were both racial and temperamental antipathies involved, and Mr. Goldstein, who was not in the Bergman secret, was glad of the opportunity to chasten Herr Schultze.

He roared at him, and Mr. Goldstein had a huge voice.

“ Is this your idea of punctuality ? And where were you yesterday ? What you young men need is discipline.”

Discipline indeed ! And from a Jew ! Herr Schultze went white and showed his teeth.

“ You mind your own business, Moses. Miller in ? ”

“ Mr. Miller is not in.”

“ Why not ? ”

“ He is in bed with sciatica. I am in authority here.

Right about turn, mount stools, work."

Herr Schultze stared hard at Mr. Goldstein, and then went to hang up his hat and coat.

"Rather sudden, Goldstein!"

"Mr. Goldstein, if you please."

"Any letters for me?"

"One. You'll find it on your desk when your excellency deigns to attend to business."

Herr Schultze gave the Jew another sharp look, mounted his stool, and glanced at the letter lying beside a ledger. The other clerks were sniggering. They did not like Mr. Otto Schultze, and were enjoying his scolding. Mr. Schultze picked up the letter and slipped it into his pocket. It was not the kind of letter which one read in public, for there were stools on either side of Herr Schultze's, and youth, especially hostile youth, can be inquisitive.

Herr Schultze read the letter in private when he discovered an excuse to visit a particular place. It was from his uncle, and though old Bergman used vague phrases they were translated easily into their proper meaning. Siegfried von Bergman stated that he had interviewed a high official in the Wilhelmstasse, and that the gentleman

had hinted that a delicate situation existed for the moment in the diplomatic world, and that Berlin did not desire any incident to arise that might complicate the issue. Therefore it behoved good patriots to walk carefully for a week or two, until ambassadorial tempers had cooled. Herr Siegfried ended with the mystic words, "Try and buy that horse for us. Am sending my stud groom over immediately to report."

Herr Schultze was peeved. He tore the letter into small pieces, deposited it in a certain receptacle, and pulled the handle. The devil take those high officials ! They were always nervy about possible indiscretions. They preferred procrastinations and pompous phrases, and the velvet glove and the poisoned ring. What would have happened outside Metz if some Berlin Chancey Bug had been in charge ? Would any diplomatic flunkey dared to have taken those audacious risks ? Prince Bismarck ought to boot out some of these Agags.

Herr Schultze was exasperated. He liked to take things at the gallop, carry a position with the bayonet, and his uncle was sending over Herr Friedman to bargain with this English fellow. There might be cunning in it, yes, but the cunning of a Machiavelli, and not of a Molte. Herr

Schultze preferred the cold, dry and ruthless precision of the great Field Marshal.

III

HOW many days was it to Christmas ? George counted them up as he put on a clean collar for the Hyde tea-party. About twenty eight ? Yet, Christmas had not quite the glamour and the lure of yesterday, for George was in love, and the Christmas vacation would separate him from the loved one. He was wearing his correct Sunday trousers ; he had cleaned his teeth and scrubbed his nails ; he tied his black tie with care, and put on his waistcoat and Eton jacket. How easy and pleasant were these exercises in personal hygiene when they were inspired by a natural urge, and not by a shrewish and interfering tongue ! Wonders of wonders, Mrs. Clapp had not objected to his going to tea at No. 1 Sussex Terrace. Mrs. Clapp had a new bonnet, and a new dress from Messrs. Roberts, and her bustle stuck out more than ever. Mrs. Clapp was in a good temper. Herr Schultze was coming to share in a musical evening.

Georgie ran downstairs. There was no need for him to

parade for inspection. He took his Sunday overcoat from the peg, the coat had a black velvet collar, and put it on. Should he wear his Sunday topper? Well, why not be thorough and complete? — though he was only going next door. He let himself out into the street, where the winter dusk had fallen suddenly. Lamps were alight, windows coming to life.

Was it just chance that made George linger for five seconds on the doorstep of the Clapp house? He had closed the door very carefully, for Mrs. Clapp was sensitive to the slam of a door. There happened to be a lamp post across the road, and two men were walking side by side on the opposite pavement. The light of the lamp as they came within its range lit up the two figures, and George saw that one of them was Herr Schultze. The second gentleman, a very fat man with a beard and moustachios and spectacles, was a stranger to George. They were walking towards the Painswick Road, and as George passed along the area railings of No. 1 he saw the two figures pause under a street lamp. Herr Schultze had his back to the boy. George rang the bell of No. 1, and then turned to watch the two men. They had their heads close together, and were talking into each other's faces. Now what was Herr Schultze doing

in Sussex Terrace at this hour, when he was to be expected at eight ?

The door of No. 1 opened and George swung round. He saw Rachel there, Rachel in a fairy pink frock. How lovely her hair looked. George's hand went to his topper. He raised it to his lady.

" I hope I'm not too early ? "

His lady smiled upon her formal little gentleman.

" You've got your Sunday clothes on."

" Well, it's a party, isn't it ? " said George.

" Only you and me and mother and father."

George did not correct her grammar. He held his hat just as his father held it when he walked up the aisle of St. John's Church.

" Anyway, it's a party."

" And there's jam-roll and rock-cakes."

" Then there'll be all the more for us ! I say, I do like your pink frock."

" Do you ? "

" Rather."

" Aren't you coming in ? "

" Of course."

George gave one backward glance at the two figures under

the street lamp, and saw that they were in the same position. Herr Schultze had his back to No. 1.

Georgie hung his topper on the hat-stand, and when Rachel offered to help him off with his coat, he would have none of it. Fairy princesses did not help fellows off with their overcoats. And then, a sudden shyness descended upon them.

George glanced up at the gas-bracket.

"You haven't started to decorate for Christmas yet."

"We don't."

"What, never?"

"No."

"Not even, mistletoe?"

She shook her head, and her hair danced. As for George, he was covered with sudden confusion. Had he been vulgar and forward in motioning mistletoe? This love affair was an on the knee romance, not the butcher-boy giving the kitchen-maid a smacker behind the back door.

Rachel smiled at her gallant.

"Shall we go upstairs?"

"After you," said George, fingering his tie.

"I believe you're shy."

"Me? Not a bit."

She waited on the bottom step with an air of serene small stateliness. Maybe, she was deliciously shy, though her shyness was sleek and affectionate, and when he joined her she slipped easily between him and the rail, and her hand found his.

“ I like you in Etons.”

“ Do you ? ”

“ Yes.”

George wanted to fall at her feet.

“ They’re not half so nice as your dress. It’s new, isn’t it ? ”

“ Yes, but mother made it.”

Ann Hyde was waiting for them by the drawing room fire. If her maturity was maternal, she had not suffered from one of those lapses when other generations are either forgotten or misunderstood. As John put it, “ Most people are like pigs looking through the slats of a fence and seeing nothing but the swill-bucket and a pair of legs.” She did not thank God with unction for not being like that, for she was conscious of positive things, and she had no complacencies, and when she saw the two children enter holding hands, the fire felt warmer and the room more bright. These little tendernesses were good for the soul.

George, feeling man, freed himself gently, and paid his courtesies to the lady.

“ How do you do. It was so kind of you to ask me.”

She did observe that he had glanced only momentarily at the tea-table. Jam-roll ! But manners should transcend appetite. His little, freckled face was frankly and cleanly hers.

“ I am so glad you could come, George.”

She did not use the diminutive. He was a little man in being, a little man in whom she divined an affectionate wholesomeness that would struggle through the nastinesses and treacheries of sex, and become man in God's image.

There were footsteps coming down the stairs, and when Ann Hyde heard them she asked George to bring her the kettle that was steaming on the nob. George was delighted to serve her. He filled the teapot for her, and was caught in this act of service by the man with the fierce black eyebrows. Hyde looked at his wife and smiled. Why did some people always command ready service ? Just because they did not demand it ?

“ Hallo Mr. Gregson! Wandered into any more houses ? ”

The gentleman was in a gay and ironic mood, and George

felt shy of him.

“ No, sir.”

“ Never mind. We’ll draw a veil.”

George seemed embarrassed by the kettle.

“ Shall I put it back, Mrs. Hyde.”

“ Yes, dear, please.”

They sat down to tea, George with his back to the fire, and on Mrs. Hyde’s right. In the presence of her parents Rachel appeared silent and serious. Did George take sugar ?

“ I bet he does,” said the ironic host.

Ann gave him two lumps.

“ Help yourself to bread and butter and jam.”

George was sitting on his hands.

“ May’nt I pass you something first ? ”

“ No, begin, dear.”

George held the dish out across the table to Rachel, and Hyde, catching his wife’s eyes, smiled at her.

“ Gentleman George, I think ! ”

“ Don’t tease,” said his wife.

George was passing the dish to his host when that bell rang. George was looking at Mrs. Hyde, and Mr. Hyde’s face had lost its fierceness, but at the sound of the bell

peeling down below, George saw Mr. Hyde's face become the face he remembered. Everything about it seemed to tighten. The black eyebrows bristled, the eyes narrowed.

Hyde was looking at his wife.

"Who's that?"

"Shall I go, dear?"

"No."

He pushed his chair back, rose, and went out and down the stairs. George was conscious of a funny feeling in the room. It had grown tight like Mr. Hyde's face. Mrs. Hyde sat there, listening, and looking at her husband's empty chair. George passed the bread and butter, and she did not appear to notice it.

"Mother, there's the bread and butter."

Ann Hyde came out of her stare.

"Thank you, George, I think I'll wait."

Voices, two voices, and one of them had a guttural rumble. The voices grew fainter. John Hyde had shown his visitor into the dining room. A door closed; footsteps came up the stairs. Mr. Hyde strode into the room, and his face looked fiercer than ever.

"Ann."

"Yes, John?"

“ I shall want Uncle James. Can you ? ”

George saw Mrs. Hyde rise. Her face had gone very white.

“ At once ? ”

“ Yes, down below, and by the garden door, I think.”

George and Rachel were left alone, and Rachel's eyes were strange and big. They seemed to confront some mystery, and George could feel it, a something in the house. But what ? Why had Mrs. Hyde looked frightened, and Mr. Hyde so fierce ? George was puzzled, troubled. The person who had rung the bell appeared to have spoilt the party. Had George been older and more sophisticated, he would have suspected a financial crisis, and that the visitor had called for money.

The two children looked at each other.

“ Ought'nt we to wait ? ” said George.

Rachel's lashes trembled.

“ No, your tea will get cold. Shall I cut you some jam roll ? ”

“ I'll finish my bread and butter first,” said George, steadfast in manners even in the absence of his elders.

Chapter 11

MR. JAMES GUY, playing the veritable pantaloon, smoking-cap on head and the gold tassel pendant over one ear, pottered, bent-backed into the room, leaning on his stick. Mr. Guy's head entered the room well before his posterior, and his decrepit pose was coloured by an almost servile smile. Mr. Guy was wearing a loose velvet jacket, and from the right hand pocket the end of a red bandana handkerchief protruded, and Mr. Guy kept fiddling with it as though he might have to mop up a nasal dewdrop.

The fat and bearded man in the arm-chair rose to his feet. He was a very large man, blond, affable and exuding when he pleased — an atmosphere of superabundant benignity. His spectacles flashed, his eyes beamed. He gave Mr. Guy an impressive bow ; his huge moustachios might have been cherubs wings.

“ May I introduce myself. I am Mr. Friedman.”

“ Glad to meet you,” said Uncle James.

Mr. Guy had shot one curt glance at John Hyde. Hyde had an elbow on the mantle-piece and a foot on the fender. There was an air of debonair and ironic grimness about John Hyde. Close to his hand stood a bronze statuette and

Hyde's fingers had been caressing it. Not a bad weapon, this, in a crisis.

"My partner, Herr Friedman."

Herr Friedman bowed again. He had the face of a benign apostle. Not even butter would melt in his mouth. Herr Friedman was the messenger of peace, the diplomat hiding his guile behind smiles of propitiation. Was he not the innocent, good, honest God-fearing German come to do business with two gentlemen who could be persuaded to collaborate in a vast enterprise for the benefit of humanity? Herr Friedman almost sweated sentiment, philanthropy, sweet candour. Could any fair-minded man accuse him of truculence, ruthlessness, cunning?

Mr. James Guy and Herr Friedman sat down, and Hyde crossed the room to close the door. He returned to his place by the fire, and resuming the same attitude, smiled upon Herr Friedman.

"This is my partner and financial adviser, Mr. James Guy. I sent for him because I think he should be present at this interview."

Herr Friedman beamed upon Mr. Guy. If this old pantaloon was as senile as he looked, his business acumen should not prove very obstructive.

“ Perhaps I had better explain, Uncle James, the terms that Herr Friedman has been authorised to offer.”

“ Quite so, quite so,” said Uncle Jimmie, his hand in the pocket that held the silk handkerchief.

“ Correct me, Herr Friedman, if I err.”

“ Aach, so, most certainly.”

“ Herr Friedman’s principals offer us fifty thousand marks for the complete invention.”

Uncle James nodded.

“ Twenty five thousand marks to be paid at once on the signing of an agreement, the remaining twenty five thousand to be handed over when the thing has proved its efficiency. That is so, is it not, Herr Friedman ? ”

The German bent a benign head.

“ But,” and Hyde paused significantly, “ I am to go to Germany, and work there, and remain in Germany until Herr Friedman’s people are satisfied.”

“ Dear me,” said Uncle James, “ rather drastic.”

“ Moreover, I understand that I am to be paid no royalty on the product if it comes on the market. Is that not so ? ”

“ Fifty thousand marks is a large sum,” said the German.

“ You think so ! What if my labour is worth fifty billion marks in the future ? ”

Herr Friedman shrugged, and spread his hands.

“ That is a hypothesis.”

“ Quite so, but you would swindle me out of the hypothesis.”

The German shrugged again, and looked less benign.

“ Dear sir, that is a vulgar word. Swindle ! We have a reputation for integrity.”

“ And I had to disguise myself to escape from your integrity ! And I am to put myself into your hands, with all my prints and calculations, and models.”

Mr. Guy was watching the German. Herr Friedman was looking less of the bland, blond sheep, and more of the wolf. There was an angry glare in the eyes behind the glasses. Uncle James knew his Germany. Your German can appear the mildest and most humane of creatures when he is hoping to lie himself into the best of a bargain, or when he has had a thrashing, but flout him when he is feeling strong and potent, and he will lose his temper and dub any argument you may use “ unheard of provocation ”.

“ Gentlemen, I have not come here to be insulted. I am here on serious business.”

Hyde threw his head back, and gave an almost noiseless laugh.

“ Your offer to me is not insult, hein ? I am to sell my soul to you Jews, become your prisoner ! ”

Almost, Herr Friedman jumped in his chair. To be called a Jew, he, a true blue Pomeranian !

“ You use that word to me ! ”

“ The trouble with you Germans is that you have no sense of humour. You just trample and shout. I think we can close this conference.”

Herr Friedman got out of his chair.

“ So, you will not treat with us. Very good. We can make a case of it. You are a thief, Herr Hyde.”

“ Indeed ! ”

“ You stole our plans. Yes, we can prove it.”

Hyde straightened.

“ Get out, you swine dog.”

Uncle James protested.

“ John, John, manners ! ”, but Mr. Guy’s hand was in his pocket.

The German seemed to bristle and to stiffen. Almost he looked like a bull ready to break loose. His eyes bulged, his throat swelled — his big hands became fists.

“ For that, you will apologise.”

“ Get out, or —— ”

The German's hands went up, and at the same moment Mr. Guy pulled out his handkerchief. There was something inside it. He looked at the thing with a kind of senile surprise, and tittered.

"Dear, dear ! I had a pistol in my pocket ! Who could have put it there ? You see Herr Friedman, someone must have wanted a joke."

The big German glared. His hands fell. He walked to the table, picked up his hat, and turned to the door.

"Very well, gentlemen, you will not be reasonable. The responsibility is yours."

"Oh, very much so," said Hyde. "Get out."

II

MARIA heard the bell of Rye House peal out in the great stone paved passage below stairs. Maria had been given her orders with regard to that bell, for Mr. Guy had warned her against opening the door to anyone while he was out of the house. Maria had a quick ear and some understanding of the mystery that surrounded the two houses, but Mrs. Hyde was sitting in Uncle James' chair, and Maria went up to her, and as she went the bell pealed out again.

Mrs. Hyde was out on the landing.

“ Who is it, Maria ? ”

“ I do not know, signora.”

“ Do not open the door unless it is Mr. Guy.”

“ It would not be Mr. Guy, signora. Did he not use the garden door and take the key with him ? ”

“ Go and see,” said Rachel’s mother, with her hand to a pale cheek.

Maria descended the stairs, and again the bell pealed out. “ That should be a God-cursed German,” said Maria to herself, “ they ring as though the celestial gates should open to them instantly.” There was a big letter box attached to the door, and Maria bent down, and with a finger raised the flap.

“ Who is there ? ”

“ Is Mr. Guy at home ? ”

Maria scowled. She should know a German voice when she heard it.

“ No, he is not at home.”

“ I have a most urgent message. If you will open the door I will come in and write it down.”

Maria gave a bitter, twisted smile. Did the man think she was such a fool ?

"Put your letter in the post, sir."

"It is urgent, very."

"Go to the god of flies," said Maria, and let the brass flap fall.

Herr Schultze stood hesitant, glaring at the door. His impulse was to kick it, but diplomacy was still in the air, and discretion was necessary, even though some bitch of an Italian insulted you. Herr Schultze did not yet know that Mr. Hyde had called Herr Friedman a swine-dog.

III

RACHEL looked at George. Why had not mother come back? The tea was growing cold, and by mutual consent she and George Gregson had not made the most of their opportunities. Only one slice of jam-roll a'piece, which act symbolised a strange and sensitive self-restraint on the part of both these children.

The voices downstairs were growing louder!

"I do wonder," Rachel began, and paused.

George eyed her steadfastly, devotedly.

"You're frightened."

Her long lashes trembled, and George's chivalry was in

arms.

“ Yes, I am. I wonder who it is downstairs. Listen, someone is quarrelling with father.”

George got up, with a little swagger, his hands in his pockets.

“ Look here, I’ll go and see.”

“ But you can’t. Oh, where is mother ? ”

“ Of course I can’t go into the room, but if your father wants help, I could call Mr. Clapp, couldn’t I ? ”

“ Could you ? ”

“ Yes. Mr. Clapp’s awfully strong.”

Rachel nodded her head at him.

“ I do like you, George.”

George Gregson blushed, gave her a loving look, and went upon the adventure with head in air. “ I do like you, George.” Might not liking mean loving ? George was an exultant and a happy hero. He went out to the landing, and stood to listen. Someone was shouting, and the voice was angry and swollen. “ Get out,” said another voice. George began to descend the stairs. He was half way down them when the door opened and a man emerged, a hairy man with a red face and spectacles, and great bat-winged moustachios. He was cramming a hat on his head, and he did not see the

small boy on the stairs. "Golly!" thought George, "that was the man who was talking to Herr Schultze under the street-lamp!" Herr Friedman dragged the front door open, barged out, and pulled the door to with a crash. The whole house seemed to shake.

"Exit Thor with thunder!" said a voice.

Mr. Hyde appeared in his dining room doorway, and he too did not see the small boy on the stairs. George hesitated, and then crouched down and did an Indian crawl back to the landing. What did all this mean? And what was the significance of Herr Schultze in the strange storm that had shaken No. 1 Sussex Terrace?

IV

THEY were re-gathered round the tea-table, with Uncle James added to the party.

"Better make some more tea, Nan. That's cold and stewed."

George was fascinated by Mr. Guy. The pantaloon had become Punch, a very high coloured, white headed and virile old gentleman whose dark eyes flashed. The boy and the old man were feeling pleased with themselves, and pleased with each other.

" Play cricket, George ?

" Yes, sir."

" Keep a straight bat, my lad, and don't funk your catches. But you won't. Shoot ? "

" I shot a rabbit last holidays."

" Good for you. And where was that ? "

" In Lincolnshire, sir. Down at Holbeach, at Uncle Bill & Joe's."

" New Holland, what, but good English. Someday, perhaps, you'll shoot a tiger."

" Have you met a tiger, sir ? "

" I have."

But, it was no longer a happy party. Mrs. Hyde seemed silent and distraught, Mr. Hyde more fierce and ironic.

Even Mr. Guy's spirited playfulness was cold steel. George had a feeling that he ought not to stay, even though Rachel had said she liked him. Moreover, George was tingling with mysterious curiosity. Why this, why that ? Mr. Schultze was coming in for music, and Mr. Schultze was becoming somewhat sinister. George was thinking, " I ought to tell Mr. Clapp. Mr. Clapp knows more about things than I do."

He did eat a second slice of jam-roll, and a rock-cake,

but the atmosphere of the room was tense and troubled. George lingered for a little while, feeling that his elders were sitting on barrels of gunpowder, and suppressing perils in the presence of the young. At half past five George rose, and said solemnly that he had home-work to do.

“Veni, vidi, vici,” chirped Uncle James.

“You must come again, dear,” said the lady.

Mr. Hyde said nothing, but lit a pipe and poked the fire.

Rachel saw George to the front door. His mother was waiting on the landing to go down and lock and bolt the door, when the children had said goodbye. George got into his overcoat, and held his hat shoulder-high.

“It’s been awfully nice. I do like your frock.”

Rachel opened the door.

“You were brave, George.”

“Was I?”

And suddenly she kissed him.

V

GEORGE found Mr. Clapp in the “Rookery”, correcting German exercises for a confrere who was on the sick list,

and Mr. Clapp was glad of an excuse to escape from so boring a business. George had a radiant face, and an air of mystery. The "Rookery" was snug and warm, and suggesting a ship's cabin and "Treasure Island", and plots and counterplots. Mr. Clapp should be wearing either an admiral's cocked-hat or a pirate's red scarf. Now, which?

"Just time for a battle, George."

It was very kind of Mr. Clapp to propose such a pastime, but George had other fish to fry, and he stood solemnly at the end of the table and confronted his mentor.

"There are things I want to tell you, sir."

"Not in trouble, George, not in trouble?"

"No, Mr. Clapp."

"Was it a good tea-party?"

"Lovely. But things happened."

"Strange things?"

"Yes, very strange," said George.

Mr. Clapp pushed the wad of exercises aside, and tilted his spectacles on to his forehead.

"Sit down at the council table, George. Now, what's the mystery."

"It's about Herr Schultze."

"Herr Schultze?", and Mr. Clapp began to wonder

whether that rather sinister young man had been attempting ——

“ He hasn’t bothered you, my child ? ”

So, George gave Mr. Clapp a description of the afternoon’s happenings, and Mr. Clapp listened with interesting interest. Assuredly the plot was thickening, and the strange behaviours of the two German gentlemen whom George had seen conferring under the street-lamp was peculiarly significant. Now, what had Herr Schultze and the other fellow been discussing, and why had only one of them called upon Mr. Hyde ? There had been high words, had there, and the second gentleman had left in a rage, and had slammed the door like the God of Thunder !

“ Do you think Herr Schultze saw you, George ? ”

“ I’m sure he didn’t, Mr. Clapp.”

“ Nor the other gentleman ? ”

“ No.”

“ Good child. You behaved with great presence of mind and discretion. And did Mr. and Mrs. Hyde seem worried ? ”

“ Mrs. Hyde went all white, Mr. Clapp, and Mr. Hyde looked fierce.”

“ Poor people ! Now, I wonder —— ”

Mr. Clapp rubbed his chin, and while he was rubbing it,

the front door bell rang. Mr. Clapp said "Ha!" as though surprised by some sudden inspiration.

"Now, I wonder, George."

They heard Ellen mount the kitchen stairs, and go to answer the bell. There were voices, and George perked up and looked at Mr. Clapp.

"That's Herr Schultze's voice."

Mr. Clapp nodded.

"We'll play Brere Rabbit. Sit still, George."

They heard the front door close, and Ellen's footsteps coming towards the "Rookery". She knocked. Told to come in, Ellen presented Mr. Clapp with a letter.

"The German gentleman left this, sir."

"Any answer, Ellen?"

"No, sir."

Ellen went off to her kitchen, and Mr. Clapp opened the letter and read it, and a peculiar smile spread over his large face.

"Herr Schultze asks to be excused, George. Urgent business. He hopes that we will allow him to postpone our musical evening till next Saturday."

George blinked.

"I wonder, Mr. Clapp ——"

“ So do I, George. We will meditate upon this mystery.”

Chapter 12

HOWEVER severely cold reason may warn us against suffering sentiment to colour and distort or issue, the fact remains that it is pleasanter for us to exert ourselves for those whom we like than for those who repel us. Spontaneity is a happy perfume, and sound emotion, sweet wine. That is why, even in the Clapp household, Ellen cleaned Mr. Clapp's boots with care, and was ready to fetch his slippers, while showing a non-conformist front to the lady. Ellen thought that Mr. Clapp would be a very pleasant gentleman to live with, but Mrs. Clapp, well, she just set your teeth on edge. Ellen thought of her as rancid butter.

Nor was Mr. Clapp immune from human prejudices, and when he and George, starting out for church on Sunday morning, fell in with Ann Hyde and her daughter, Mr. Clapp surrendered to prejudice. Mrs. Clapp had a headache and was staying in bed.

Mr. Clapp liked things douce and pretty and soft voiced. He liked Ann Hyde, and he liked Rachel. A charming, sensitive child. And the mother was rather the tragic nurse, Sarah Siddons with less nose, and the secret

romanticist in Mr. Clapp was inveigled into partisanship.

He had said to George that he would meditate upon the problem, and he did so as he pounded his way down Upper Street and the Goswell Road on his way to the day's pedagogy. Now, what was the precise significance of this young Prussian who pretended to be an obscure clerk learning the English language ? Why were Herr Schultze and his confederate so interested in the house next door ? Did it hold hidden treasure of a sort, and if so, what sort of treasure ? It could not be bullion, for No. 1 Sussex Terrace did not advertise opulence. It might be some secret, and if so, what ? A process, a formula, something that might be tempting to the Money Changers ?

Mr. Clapp was more than interested ; he began to feel responsible. Georgie Gregson's very innocent curiosity had been as valuable as the acumen of Mr. Sherlock Homes. Mr. Clapp did not like Herr Schultze, even though he had sung duets with him, for, there exuded from Herr Schultze the arrogant male stink of the Prussian. Well, what was to be done about it ? And then, Mr. Clapp dubbed himself an ass. Call on his neighbour ? Why, obviously ! They might get on together, and with a little friendliness Mr. Clapp might find an opportunity to be helpful. If Herr Schultze

thought that he was going to score behind the goal-posts, then Mr. Clapp would find considerable satisfaction in tackling the fellow and bringing him down in the mud.

“ No time like the present,” said Josiah Wedgewood, and putting a pipe and a pouch in his pocket, and leaving George in the “ Rookery ” to his prep. Mr. Clapp sneaked out and rang the bell of No. 1. Now, who would answer it, the Tragic Mariam, or Griselda, or Othello ?

The door opened, and the figure was male.

“ Hope I’m not disturbing you ? ”

He was met at first by an ironic silence.

“ Seemed churlish not to call, when we live next door. Besides, my little friend, George, seems to be persona grata.”

“ Mr. Clapp, I think ? ” said the dark man.

“ Josiah Wedgewood, schoolmaster, and would be artist.”

Hyde’s stiff face softened into a smile. There was something engaging and human about this large creature ; the fellow had a sense of fun. Even your scientific investigator may know moments when he may feel the urge to smack a thigh, and listen to a funny story, and bellow with laughter.

“ Come in. Got a pipe ? ”

“ Never go anywhere without one. Regular Pan in that respect ! ”

“ Same here. Let’s play on the pipes. Come in, my friend. I’m in a mood to put my feet up.”

Hyde took Mr. Clapp into the dining room where a very small fire was burning.

“ Take that chair, sir. Mind if I go and lock the door. Lots of burglaries of late. Don’t want to have to shoot one.”

Mr. Clapp sat down and brought out his pipe.

“ No, the law is so fussy about such things.”

“ Needlessly so. The law always seems to be on the side of the rogue.”

“ Fellow feeling, perhaps ! ”

Hyde laughed and went out to lock and bolt the door. Mr. Clapp nursed his pipe, a very large and curly pipe, and studied the room and its furniture. Very much of an improvisation, the furniture. Looked as though it had been purchased in bits here, there, and everywhere. The whole lot wouldn’t fetch ten pounds at an auction. Mr. Clapp felt sympathetic. He too had endured his struggles and his frustrations. Charlotte was one of them ; Charlotte did not get on with people, and she had

antagonised the "Head's" wife.

Mr. Hyde returning, glanced at Mr. Clapp and his pipe. He too smoked a pipe like that.

"My pattern, exactly."

"I like them curly."

"Mine had been known as the French Horn."

"And mine as Bubble & Squeak."

Each was saying "I like this fellow."

"I say, want some tobacco?"

"Oh, I have my own particular brand."

"Not Player's Navy?"

"How did you know?"

"Smoke it myself."

They began to laugh lightly together, and to feel that the other chap was good for the brain and the belly.

Hyde poked the fire.

"Wake up, you bitch."

Mr. Clapp chuckled. What a change from Charlotte! There were times when Mr. Clapp wanted to get drunk, and come home and use the most disgraceful language, and plant Charlotte across his knee and spank her. Gosh, that would be real drama! And it might have been for Charlotte.

They filled their pipes, and Hyde provided Mr. Clapp

with a spill.

“Matches precious, if you don’t mind. Economy has to be our text.”

There was a moment of defiance in the lift and the turn of the head.

“Thanks,” said Mr. Clapp, accepting the spill.

“Same with me. That’s why I take a boarder. Gives us our summer holiday.”

“Not a bad kid, that.”

“Oh, George? George was born a little gentleman. No fool either.”

They lit spills and pipes, and Hyde perched himself on a footstool, but leaving his visitor a full share of the fire.

“Yes, why pretend? Damned humbug. You know, Clapp, it’s the social slavery that puts one in the mud. It’s shameful to be poor. The really shameful thing is insincerity.”

“Absolutely. That’s why I selected George. Your sensitive child starts as a clean mirror.”

“And then sex and snobbery foul it.”

“Need they? A man by himself need not feel poor. He doesn’t have to have a new bonnet every three months. Fact is, if I could live in a shack and paint ——”

“You wouldn’t care a damn about shabby pants. I suppose

you wonder what I do ? ”

Mr. Clapp looked him straight in the face.

“ To be curious is to be human. I plead guilty. No need to satisfy my curiosity.”

“ Honest devil ! I’m what the world calls an inventor.”

“ Thanks,” said Mr. Clapp, “ I wondered. Well, if my sympathy is needed, it’s on your side. By the way, would you think it impertinent if I showed you a letter ? ”

“ Hardly. But why ? ”

“ Certain curious circumvolutions are associated with it. Might be of significance.”

Mr. Clapp felt in his pocket, and brought out Herr Schultze’s note.

He handed it to Hyde who read it through, and was silent, frowning at the fire. Then, he looked again at his letter, as though something about it baffled him.

“ I can’t see that this has anything to do with me.”

“ Perhaps not.”

“ Who is the fellow ? ”

“ He is supposed to be a clerk who is over here learning the language. I wondered —— ”

Hyde glanced at him quickly.

“ Just what ? ”

“ Whether you might recognise the writing.”

Hyde's pipe had gone out, and he relit it. He laid the piece of paper on his knee, and studied it.

“ Damn it, I believe you are right. But, why ? ”

“ May I be frank ? ”

The two men looked at each other.

“ Why all this trouble ? ”

“ Well, I'm English, my dear sir, and I don't like the Germans.”

“ Go ahead.”

“ This Schultze fellow lives in digs not two hundred yards from here. He struck up an acquaintance with Georgie Gregson. I was a bit suspicious, you know what I mean. I've been investigating the fellow myself, asked him into music. It struck me that he was interested in your house.”

“ What's he like to look at ? ”

“ Tall and fair ; looks like a Prussian and a soldier. Smiles much, but has tiger teeth. Now, George is quite a bright child. He was at tea with you the other day.”

“ Yes.”

“ And someone called.”

“ Very much so.”

“ George happened to be on your stairs when the gentleman left.”

“ Well, what of that ? ”

“ Just this. When George was coming to your house he saw the gentleman who called on you and this Schultze fellow having a very solemn pow-wow under a street lamp. As I said, Georgie is a bright child.”

“ Did he tell you all this ? ”

“ He did. It may annoy you, but it can't be helped. Your own affairs are your own affairs, and I'm not a meddler, but I thought —— ”

“ Thanks.”

“ Just one more thing. Schultze was to have joined us in a musical evening. He postponed it, as you see by that letter.”

“ When did you receive it ? ”

“ Herr Schultze delivered it himself about an hour after your other visitor had left you.”

Hyde got up and walked about the room, his pipe in his mouth, his hands in his trouser pockets, and Mr. Clapp sat peacefully smoking. He had done what he considered to be his old fashioned English duty. The rest was on the knees of the gods. He had no doubt at all now but that these

mysterious comings and goings had a very grim meaning for his host, and that Georgie's man with the black eyebrows had something to hide.

Rachel's father came back to the fire, and sat down again on the high footstool. He was biting hard on his pipe.

"If you think all this damned cheek, sir," said Mr. Clapp, "say so."

"I don't."

"Thank you."

"Most motives are mixed. Probably, yours combine ——"

"Prejudices," said Mr. Clapp quickly, "impulses, all sorts of human susceptibilities, a sense of smell."

Hyde's chin jerked round. He was smiling, if grimly so.

"And a sense of humour, a thing the Germans can neither import nor export. Now, I'm a queer devil. I loathe and I like, and my ways go by loathing or liking. Do you know what these Germans are after?"

"I might infer."

"A dozen things. I'll tell you."

Mr. Clapp held up a large hand like a policeman stopping traffic.

"Wait a bit. You don't know anything about me. I might be one of the gang."

“ Are you ? ”

“ No.”

“ I’ll accept that. Well —— ”

“ One moment, maybe I don’t wish to know.”

“ Why not ? ”

“ Might seem too much like landing a fish. I don’t like that sort of slyness.”

“ Good enough. Well, I’ll tell you this much. I have something that these dear Teutons would like to pinch. Patriotism, and all that, you know, larded with profit.”

“ An invention, I presume ? ”

Hyde nodded.

“ Just that.”

There was silence. John Hyde picked up the tongs and extracted a lump of coal from the coal-box. He put the lump on the fire, but he retained the tongs, letting them lie like a sword across his knees.

“ Are those for me, in case of —— ? ”

Hyde laughed.

“ No, just a gesture, I suppose ! What would you do, my friend, if certain people offered you twopence halfpenny for your immortal soul and the results of five years research ? ”

Mr. Clapp sat up in his chair.

“What should I do? Well, I think I should put on the heaviest boots I had, and administer the largest kick I could raise.”

“Good man,” said his host. “In my experience that is the only way to deal with a German.”

II

MR. CLAPP returned to No. 2 Sussex Terrace, reflecting upon the strangeness and suddenness of man's likes and dislikes, his faiths and mistrusts, his loves and angers. But was it so strange? After all, life is organic, and even if you co-opted the stars, the attractions and repulsions of both the flesh and the spirit were instant and forceful. Yes, sometimes disastrously so! Mr. Clapp had found himself accepted as an ally, and an official inquiry agent in the case of the Barbarians against Greece, and he was trying to sneak quietly into the “Rookery”, when the drawing-room door opened, and his wife's voice was heard in the house.

“Wedgewood, is that you?”

“Yes, my dear.”

“ Where have you been ? ”

Charlotte was the sort of interfering fool who would ask that kind of question, tweaking you by the hair just when you were feeling playful and happy. A sudden angry naughtiness flared in Mr. Clapp.

“ Where have I been ? ”

“ Yes, Wedgewood.”

Mr. Clapp gave the hat-stand a bang so that it rocked and chattered.

He burst into song.

“ Rule Britannia, Britannia rules the waves. Husbands never, never, never should be slaves.”

Mrs. Clapp was shocked.

“ Wedgewood, how dare you ! Come up here at once. You’ve been —— ”

“ I’ve been to The Bunch of Grapes, my dear. And now I am going to play soldier with Georgie.”

“ Wedgewood, I insist —— ”

“ Don’t be such an idiot, Charlotte. I really feel like coming upstairs and spanking you.”

Mrs. Clapp slammed the door. Disgraceful ! And Ellen, who had been listening on the kitchen stairs, let out a little gurgle of joy. “ T-che, that was the stuff to give the

lady. Why hadn't Mr. Clapp done it before ? ”

George, too, had heard the altercation, and when Mr. Clapp entered the “ Rookery ”, George, innocent and demur, had his head bowed over his Latin grammar. Mr. Clapp was in one of those Bohemian moods when he might whack you and then take you to the school tuck-shop. Mr. Clapp had assumed an air of pretentious solemnity. Certain things were not mentioned between men. Oh, no ! Mr. Clapp sat down, took off his glasses and polished them, blew his nose, and then addressed himself to George.

“ Mr. George Gregson.”

“ Yes, sir ? ”

“ We will not play soldiers tonight. We will hold a council of war. This is a most serious business.”

“ What, sir ? ” asked George, with eyes popping.

“ The affair of Herr Schultze and his bearded friend. Mum's the word, George.”

“ Yes, sir.”

“ Be silent as the grave. No, my dear, I am not fooling. We are going to play Treasure Island.”

“ Me, too, Mr. Clapp ? ”

“ Certainly. Now listen, most carefully. This Mr. Schultze is the villain. There is a plot, George, a plot

against our friends next door. Are we to help in spoiling it ? ”

“ Why, yes, Mr. Clapp.”

“ Very well, George. Let us be cunning. Let us know nothing. If the chance offers, be friendly with Mr. Schultze. You are the innocent schoolboy. Watch him. If you hear and see a German band, take notice. Play scout. Is that clear ? ”

“ Quite, Mr. Clapp,” and George’s eyes were bright, and his little bottom ready to jump up and down on the chair.

“ The innocent schoolboy. Softlee walkee catchee monkey. I too shall be on the prowl.”

George’s eyes grew dreamy.

“ Does Rachel know, sir ? ”

“ I hope not. Cherish and defend the lady, George.”

“ I will, sir.”

Chapter 13

THE week passed peacefully, and without further alarms and excursions, on two mornings George Gregson walked city-wards with Herr Otto Schultze. Herr Schultze was all smiles. Yes, he was looking forward very much to the next musical evening. He very much regretted having had to postpone the pleasure, but an old friend had arrived unexpectedly from Germany, and Herr Schultze had had to find accommodation for him. And what a charming lady was Frau Clapp ! George let the encomium pass, for he was beginning to divine in Herr Schultze that insincerity against which Mr. Clapp warned him. Or did the Germans really admire ladies like Mrs. Clapp ? Herr Schultze appeared to be in a happy, boyish mood. And why ? Yes, he hoped to go to Germany for Christmas, and Christmas in Germany was a real festival, candles and Christmas trees and affectionate family rejoicings. Would George like some more German soldiers ? Most certainly George would. Very well, Mr. Schultze would try to bring him back some soldiers from Nuremberg, Prussian artillery complete with guns. The German guns were the best in the world, and no one could produce lead soldiers as the craftsmen of

Nuremberg produced them.

George felt it necessary to show excitement and gratitude.

“ Will there be horses for the guns ? ”

“ Of course, George, and soldiers on the gun-carriages, and limbers. We, in Germany, things thoroughly do.”

George was delighted. But why did Herr Schultze want to bring him soldiers ?

“ May I tell Mr. Clapp ? ”

“ Why, yes,” said Herr Schultze, who continued to see in that elephantine person nothing but a fat and sentimental fool.

II

ON that Saturday afternoon George, the devoted lover, waited outside the door of No. 1 Sussex Terrace. It would be not be a chocolate and rock-cake occasion, for George was out of funds, and there were Christmas presents waiting to be purchased. Yet, for George it was to prove quite another sort of occasion, and had he known what the afternoon had in store for him, he might have shirked the adventure. Had not Rachel complimented him on his

courage ? Dragons and cannibals could have no terrors for the hero.

But it was to be a Yarbury afternoon. The two children, walking up Highbury Grove towards a side-gate leading into the Fields, were seen by the two Yarbury boys who were kicking a tin about the garden of No.13. Instantly, they were interested. Persecuting another boy might be better sport than booting a tin over the grass and gravel.

Said Sydney, " He's got a girl. Let's take his girl away."

" Good egg ! " said Bob, using a phrase of his father's.

Rachel and George, absorbed in each other, did not suspect that these two young things were shadowing them. Some measure of privacy was necessary if you were out to torment a victim, and discretion warned you to wait until you had your prey in a quiet corner away from interfering grown-ups. The Yarbury boys had been making war upon the neighbours' cats, and had been caught in the act.

Complaints had been made to the " Head ", that large and Olympian demi-god who, on serious occasions, caned publicly and in person, and the Yarbury louts had been well and truly thrashed before school prayers. The " Head " could swipe when a young bully or a sadist were brought before him, and the Yarbury bottoms had been sore for days.

Now, beyond the " Fields " a large old house with an extensive garden had fallen into the hands of the Improvers. The house was in the process of being pulled down, the garden derelict, and in its high brick wall great gaps had been knocked to facilitate the carting away of bricks and timber. Old elms lay prone with their tops and main limbs amputated, but a splendid Cedar of Lebanon still stood, though marauding boys had broken some of its lower branches. On this Saturday afternoon the place happened to be deserted, a fascinating desolation, with no workers about, and no casual plunderers or be-spoilers to be seen. George and Rachel, walking hand in hand up a gravel path, caught sight of this mysterious, man-made ruin, and were thrilled by it. The house was roofless, and its windows stripped of their frames, though the chimneys remained like hands stretched up to heaven and protesting against death and mutilation.

The children stood and gazed.

" Let's go and look," said George.

" Can we ? Doesn't it look sad ? "

They found a side gate which opened on the road whose end was closed by the broken wall of the derelict garden. There was a breach here whose open mouth bade them enter

and survey the ruins. They came to the place, and still holding hands, peered in, like two children in a fairy tale, discovering a deserted city.

“ There’s no one here,” said George.

“ Doesn’t it look sad ? ” said Rachel again.

“ Let’s go in.”

The Yarbury boys, shadowing the two children, saw them disappear into the wild garden. This was a Yarbury opportunity. It suited the occasion. The brigands had trapped the two innocents in the haunted forest !

George and Rachel were standing under the great cedar, looking up at its black trunk, and the branches which spread out in flat green shelves, when their dream was broken.

“ Hallo, young Gregson ! What do you mean by sneaking in here ? ”

George, still holding Rachel’s hand, and holding it perhaps a little more firmly, turned his head and saw the two.

“ Just looking.”

“ Oh, are you ! ” said Bob, “ and who gave you permission ? ”

George went pink, and then pale, but it was Rachel who

answered Mr. Robert Yarbury.

“ No one did. We have as much right here as you.”

Bob Yarbury came stalking up to them rather like a gaunt young cock. It was a cold day, and both his nose and hands looked red. His brother sauntered after him. Sydney was the embryo man about town, more smooth, more sly, more debonair.

“ Who spoke to you, kid ? ”

Rachel's eyelashes quivered, and her colour rose.

“ I'm sure I don't want you to speak to me.”

“ Cheeky, what ! Pull her hair for me, Syd.”

Sydney grinned, sauntered up with his hands in his pockets. He stared at Rachel. A pretty kid, this, and Sydney was more impressionable than Robert.

“ Unhook, youngster.”

“ What ? ”

“ Drop paws.”

Rachel, head in air, defied him.

“ I shant.”

Sydney's right hand shot out of his pocket, and made a grab at the girl's hair, but with a quick movement and a throw back of the head, she eluded him. George was trembling. He dropped Rachel's hand, and with sudden fury

threw himself upon Sydney. He did manage to land one wild punch on the other boy's nose, but Yarbury Minor closed with him, crooked a leg round George's, threw him, and had him down and under. Sydney was two years older than George, and much too strong for the other child. George fought and squirmed, but Sydney remained on top, and straddling the vanquished one, proceeded to flick him in the face with the red knuckles of his right hand.

Robert gloated.

"That's it. Teach the cheeky little squirt manners."

George panted and squirmed.

"Let me up, you coward, and fight properly."

Sydney gave the underling another smack across the mouth.

"Shut up. I'll keep you there till you apologise or blub."

Rachel, watching her hero licked and straddled, and the futile lashing of his little legs, was shocked, first into a kind of sisterly shame, and then into passionate partisanship. She flung herself suddenly upon the Yarbury boy, caught him by the ears and pulled. Sydney let out a squawk of anger and of pain.

"Here, let go."

He sagged back on his heels and clutched her wrists, while George made a furious attempt to writhe himself free from those straddling legs. He was in the very act of squirming away when Bob Yarbury bent down and caught him by the collar.

“ I’ll deal with young Gregson, Syd. You ought to be able to lick a girl.”

Sydney straightened on his knees, threw his head back, and caught Rachel’s mouth with his hard cranium. She winced, but held on. Meanwhile, a man in a black bowler hat, and a shaggy overcoat, who had been watching the affair from the ground floor of the house’s shell, walked out between the two pillars of the porch, and shouted at the Yarbury brothers.

“ Stop that, you two young bullies.”

He came striding towards them between dumps of rubbish and piles of brick, a big blond man with eyes that could be very terrifying when they were angry. His approach was so menacing and so obvious in its purpose, that Bob let go of George, and Rachel, whom Sydney had shaken off, stood looking at his well, great dark eyes. Her mouth was bleeding, and a little blot of blood showed on her chin.

The Yarbury boys bolted, but the man went after them, and

he carried a stick. For a big man he was very quick on his feet, and Bob was his quarry, and he caught Master Bob as he was racing for the gap in the wall. Holding Bob Yarbury by the collar, he forced him into the required position, and administered three fierce whacks to Master Bob's posterior.

"Now, run home and tell your mother."

III

GEORGE was in tears. He stood there rubbing his school cap which had been soiled in the struggle, while Rachel played the little mother. Young Yarbury had put George down in a muddy patch, and Georgie's knickers and jacket had suffered, and Rachel, though her lip was bleeding, found a handkerchief and sacrificed it to Georgie's needs. Their rescuer, somehow wise as to the man-child's shame, left them alone together, and walked back to the shell of the old house. He was Clerk of the Works to the firm who were to build new houses here.

"It wasn't fair, was it?" sobbed George.

This was no Ivanhoe adventure. He had been licked, and licked in the presence of his lady. That young goat of a

Yarbury had put him down, and sat on him ; mud and humiliation were mingled. George's tears were angry tears. What must Rachel think of him !

Rachel was rubbing his knickers.

" He was much bigger than you."

George gulped.

" He got me down. He wouldn't fight with his fists."

Did Rachel divine her hero's sense of shame ?

No doubt she did. Strange that Georgie's humiliation should be hers, and that instead of feeling scorn she was filled with a young tenderness. She rubbed away at the stains of poor George's suit, and was moved to assuage or efface those other wounds. Her hero had dared to attack ; he had not cringed or funk'd the issue, in spite of the odds against him. George's fury had been for her.

" I think you were very brave. Two big boys like that."

" He was going to pull your hair," said George.

" But you didn't let him."

Georgie's sobbing ceased.

" Silly, my blubbing like this. I've never done it before."

" It was because you were so angry."

" I — I'll learn to box," said George, " and then I'll lick

that chap."

He had kept his wet face from Rachel. He found a handkerchief and blew his nose, and dared at last to confront his Rowena. He was trying to smile. Well, he had saved her from having her hair pulled. How dared those cads think of pulling such pretty hair! If only — and then he saw Rachel's wounded lip, and the blood mark on her chin.

He stood and stared, contrite and self accused.

"I say, your lip's been bleeding."

"Yes, it was that nasty boy's head."

"Let's look."

His face drew close to hers.

"Haven't you a handkerchief? O, yes, you've used it."

He looked at the ball of cambric in his hand, and remembered that he had blown his nose on it.

"I've used mine. You've got some blood on your chin."

"Have I?"

"Wish I could wipe it."

"You've got a handkerchief."

"But I've blown my nose in it."

"On all of it? There may be a clean corner."

George spread the handkerchief. Yes, only a part of it

had received use. A good half of it was reasonably clean. George poked a finger into the clean half, and held the draped digit out to her.

“ You spit.”

“ Must I ? ”

“ I mustn't. Wouldn't be nice. Just a little. It's only a small spot.”

Very solemnly she primed the handkerchief, and just as solemnly George removed the stain from her chin.

“ That's done it. Did it hurt much ? ”

“ When ? ”

“ When that beast bumped you ? ”

“ Just a little.”

“ I'm awfully sorry, Rachel, dear. I say, you, you aren't ashamed of me, are you ? ”

And she kissed him.

IV

REASONABLY recovered both in the spirit and the flesh George and Rachel were about to leave the scene of George's humiliation, when the big man came out of the house, tucking a note-book away in his overcoat pocket.

“ Where are you two kids going ? ”

Rachel looked at George. Her hero should be crowned with a reassuring authority.

“ Back to the Fields, ” said George, and then he added, “ I’ve got twopence, and there’s a cake shop down there.”

The man smiled upon them.

“ Highbury Corner way ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ I’ll see you down there in case those two young blackguards are on the prowl. Same school as you ? ”

“ Yes, sir.”

“ Why don’t you —— ? Oh, that would be sneaking, wouldn’t it ? ”

“ I’m going to learn to box,” said George, “ and then I’ll challenge Sydney Yarbury.”

“ That’s the spirit, my son. Yarbury ! Yahoo would be a better title.”

The big man walked between them down through The Fields, and out into the road along Highbury Terrace. The Yarbury boys were nowhere to be seen. When they came to the cake shop, George took off his cap to his rescuer.

“ Thank you, sir.”

The man looked at him with paternal approval.

“ Come on inside, you two. I’ll stand cakes.”

He held out two big hands and shepherded them into the shop.

“ Now then, what’s the little lady fancy ? ”

Rachel looked dreamily at a dish of doughnuts.

“ I do like —— ”

“ Doughnuts ! So do I. Nice surgary ones, with a good splodge of jam in the middle. Excuse me, Miss, have those doughnuts got jam in them ? ”

“ Of course,” said the lady behind the counter, rather tartly, “ they’re raspberry.”

“ Put three in a bag. Now, what’s your choice, my son ? ”

“ Rock cakes,” said George.

“ And three rock cakes, please, Miss.”

“ I say, sir, it’s awfully good of you.”

“ Pleasure, not virtue, my child ! Now, go and fill up in The Fields.”

He smiled upon Rachel.

“ Goodbye, Miss Doughnut.”

Rachel put up her face.

“ I think you’re awfully kind.”

“ And handsome ? ”

“ Yes.”

The man laughed and kissed her.

“ Handsome is as handsome does. Goodbye, children. I have to catch a train at Highbury station.”

Rachel and George stood on the pavement and waved goodbye to him, and then carried their paper bags into The Fields and found an empty seat. They had the shrubs and the railings and the austere length of Highbury Terrace behind them. A couple of cheeky and interested sparrows came hopping around, bright eyed for crumbs.

“ Have one of my doughnuts ? ” said Rachel.

“ Don’t you want them all ? I’ll have one if you’ll have one of my rock-cakes.”

“ Doughnuts are softer.”

“ Does your lip hurt ? ”

“ Just a little.”

“ Then I won’t have a doughnut. You eat them all.”

“ Do, George.”

“ No, I won’t.”

“ Then I’ll take one home to mothers. Wasn’t that a nice man ? ”

“ Very,” said George, “ I hope I shall grow up big like that.”

George ate two rock-cakes and scattered a few crumbs to

the sparrows. The third rock-cake he slipped into Rachel's bag. She was to take that home to Mrs. Hyde.

"I think your mother is awfully pretty."

"Do you?"

"Almost as pretty as you. My mother's pretty too."

"Is she fair or dark?"

"She's got golden hair," said George, "and all crinkly. I like hair like that. Don't you?"

"Yes."

"Or wavy, like yours."

George's love-making was challenged abruptly by a sudden blare of music. George jumped up and peering through the bushes, saw that a German band had stationed itself almost opposite their seat, and was serenading Highbury Terrace. The flute twiddled, the big brass tubes went "Umph-umph", the trombone blared. It was very bad music, through German, but it made a cheerful noise.

"Do you like music?"

"Yes. I play the piano."

"What's it they are playing?"

"A march, I think."

"I wish they'd play a Christmas tune. Hark the Herald Angels."

“ Do you like carols ? ”

“ Yes, don't you ? Turkey and sausages, and plum pudding, and custard, and crackers.”

Rachel looked demur. George's appreciation of music seemed to her a little carnal. But, after all, she had put away two doughnuts, and she was not in a position to be critical.

“ I don't think I like turkey, much.”

“ Roast beef, more. I say, there's Herr Schultze ! ”

George made a half dive through the bushes, and then stood still, a small Jack in the Green, with a laurel for cover. Herr Otto Schultze was strolling along the opposite pavement, smoking a cigar. He stopped to listen to the band ; he waved a hand to and fro as though beating time to the music. Well, it was very natural that Herr Schultze, being a German, should listen to his compatriots playing German music, but Georgie had been told to watch Herr Schultze, and to treat him with suspicion.

Herr Schultze smiled upon the band, showing those strange fangs of his. He felt in a trouser pocket, examined the coins in his hand, transferred a piece of silver to the hand that held the cigar, and returned the rest of the money to his pocket. Herr Schultze spoke to the musicians

in German, kindly if patronisingly.

“ Play me the Blue Danube.”

A shilling lay in his palm. The old fellow who played the big brass thing raised his hat, but it was the flute-player who stepped on to the pavement, and with a little bow, collected Herr Schultze's shilling. Herr Schultze smiled upon him kindly, and with a gesture of the cigar, pointed at the flute-player's fellows.

“ Where from ? ”

“ Munich, mein Herr.”

“ Ach, Munich ! Wagner ! Can you play the prelude from Tristan ? ”

“ We can,” said the flute-player.

Herr Schultze seemed to close one eye. He gave a wave of the cigar, and strolled a little way, with the flutist beside him. They conversed. A casual spectator could have inferred that, very naturally, they were speaking of things German.

“ Ach, that is good, very good. Now go and play me the Blue Danube.”

The flute-player raised his hat.

“ With pleasure, mein Herr.”

Herr Schultze stood and listened to the strains of

Strauss, while smoking his cigar. He did not see the small boy behind the laurel, but George was wondering what Herr Schultze and the flute-player had said to each other. Assuredly, Mr. Clapp ought to be told.

Chapter 14

MR. CLAPP was told, and Mr. Clapp commended Georgie.

“ A good piece of work, G.G. I have a feeling that Herr Schultze’s kindness is not quite disinterested.”

It was a mild evening, with the wind rising, Atlantic weather, and after tea and a pipe, Mr. Clapp said that he would go for a walk before it began to rain.

“ How do you know it is going to rain, Wedgewood ? ”

“ Corns, my dear.”

How vulgar of him !

“ You ought to visit a chiropodist.”

“ I might.”

“ Where are you going, Wedgewood ? ”

“ To the Hesperides, Charlotte, for exercise.”

“ Don’t forget that Herr Schultze is coming in for music.”

Mrs. Clapp was such an able exponent of the obvious.

Mr. Clapp put on his hat and overcoat, and for appearances sake took his umbrella from the stand. His evening stroll would carry no further than the door of No. 1, that is to say if Mr. Hyde happened to be at home. Mr. Hyde was at home, and it was he who opened the door to Mr. Clapp.

" May I come in, sir ? I have a little information that might interest you."

" Oh, come in, Clapp. Afraid there's no fire downstairs."

" It's very warm tonight."

" Yes, quite muggy."

Mr. Clapp noticed that Hyde both locked and bolted the front door. He was wearing a rather ragged old coat, and the cuffs of the sleeves were stained with oil. Hyde lit the gas in the dining room, glanced at the curtains to see that they were drawn, and reached for his tobacco tin.

" My one vice ! Have a fill ? "

" Thanks, I will. Your wife doesn't seem to object."

" Ann ? Oh, she's kind to me. Understands that a man must escape somewhere and sometimes, even if it is only in nicotine."

" Wise woman."

Mr. Clapp sat down, and accepted the tobacco tin, but he only half filled his pipe. Hyde's one vice might be precious to him, and No. 1 Sussex Terrace was no Canaan.

" Well, what I have to tell you may be evidence or not. That bright child, G.G. saw something this afternoon, and reported it to me. A German band playing in front of Highbury Terrace."

“ The same old band ! ”

“ I imagine so. But the point is this, the Schultze fellow came strolling along, and stopped to listen to them murdering Mozart. He handed out largesse, and then he and the flute-player —— ”

“ Ah, the flute-player ! ”

“ Strolled off and had a short conversation. Quite natural, of course, for two Germans —— ”

“ Quite. And where was George ? ”

“ On the other side of the railings, and concealed in the shrubbery.”

“ Did Schultze see him ? ”

“ George thinks not.”

Mr. Clapp paused to light his pipe, while Hyde, one foot on the brass fender, filled the bowl of his, crumbling the tobacco carefully from the tin which he had placed on the marble mantle shelf. His hands, stained with much contact with oil and metal, were the fingers of a worker, seamed and discoloured along the sides of thumbs and first-fingers, but they were steady hands, inexorable hands. Mr. Clapp, his pipe alight, watched the movements of his host's fingers. He could visualise the man with the black eyebrows getting those hands on an enemy's throat, and

ruthlessly throttling him.

“ I’m much obliged to you, Clapp. G.G. is a bright child. In my position one has to cultivate the trivial.”

“ And observe it.”

“ Exactly. Thousandths of an inch. Even the microscopic structure of steel. I wonder just how many members of that shabby orchestra are genuine trombone and sausage.”

“ What one would call multiplicity in disguise.”

“ Yes, and the music. It occurs to me —— ”

He paused to light his pipe, and Mr. Clapp waited, puffing comfortably at his.

“ It occurs to me that if that band were at full blast outside a house, sounds of particular happenings inside the house might be most efficiently smothered.”

“ That, I confess, had not occurred to me.”

“ But you do —— ? ”

“ Most certainly. Thunder and lightning off stage.”

“ While the victim is murdered.”

Mr. Clapp heaved in his chair.

“ My dear sir, do you really believe that the business is as sinister as that ? ”

Hyde gave him an oblique, sardonic smile.

“ I do.”

“ Then, surely, you should take precautions, appeal to the police.”

“ And advertise, my particular secret, to the million ? No, my friend. Besides, it’s rather like a game of poker, with pistols under the table. It may seem silly to you, but I have a preference for playing my own hand. There’s a sort of grim zest in it.”

Mr. Clapp nodded.

“ I suppose you are —— ? ”

“ Armed, oh, yes, and Uncle James can shoot like a Buffalo Bill. Is there anything —— ? ”

“ Yes, this fellow Schultze is spending the evening with us. Sentimental ballads, and all that. I think it is obvious that he is cultivating contiguity. For your information, my dear sir.”

“ Thanks. We’ll be particularly alert tonight. And if that band should ever start booming outside my house —— ”

“ I shall be moved to play you a sudden visit.”

“ You might find it a rough house.”

“ I may be only a pedagogue, Hyde, and life can be rather dull. I’ll confess that in a good cause, I might find considerable pleasure in punching people.”

II

CHARLOTTE CLAPP was preparing for the coming of Siegfried. Or was it Tristan or Parsival ? If No. 2 Sussex Terrace was not, exactly, Venusberg, Mrs. Clapp could sit in front of her mirror, and consider her person and its adornment. Her new black silk dress, yes, with the blue buttons down the front, and even more bustle added. Did the good Victorians think that an exaggerated posterior attracted the male ? Missions to Hottentots forbid ! Charlotte could not descend to face powder or rouge, only Leicester Square, etc. were so disgustingly French, but Charlotte could allow herself ear rings. The shades of otherness in personal adornment are so very subtle. Mrs. Clapp peeked at herself in her mirror. Yes, she still looked quite young. She liked to emphasise in public the fact that she was eleven years younger than her husband, though this figure was not quite accurate. Good women can be the most consummate liars where charm is concerned, or is it that the dear creatures assume a right to transcend the bathos of numerical exactitude ?

Mr. Clapp, climbing the stairs, to change his collar and

tie and jacket, found the door locked.

“ What is it, Wedgewood ? ”

“ Oh, nothing, my dear, just personal adornment.”

“ You can come in presently.”

“ Holy, holy, holy,” said Mr. Clapp to himself. “ Lady God Almighty.”

“ Wedgewood,” shrilled his wife.

“ Yes, my dear.”

“ We are having a little wine tonight. I thought Herr Schultze might like Hock.”

“ Grocers Hock ! ”

“ You will find the bottle in the sideboard. Draw the cork.”

“ Yes, my dear,” and Mr. Clapp lumbered obediently down the stairs.

Mr. Clapp did not like Rhine Wine, though the Rhinelanders were less repulsive than the Prussians. He preferred beer, or good Burgundy, or whisky, and taking the long slim bottle in his hands he searched the sideboard drawers for a corkscrew. The tool was not there. Was it that Charlotte did not approve of corkscrews ? Poor Charlotte ! And was Herr Schultze the kind of person upon whom women wasted wine, even though it was only grocer's

wine ? Mr. Clapp went to the head of the kitchen stairs, and shouted to Ellen for a corkscrew.

“ A corkscrew, sir ! Whatever for ? ”

“ Inspiration, Ellen. To extract the stubborn pith of a problem.”

Ellen giggled up the stairs.

“ You do love long words, sir.”

“ Verbosity and euthanasia, Ellen may be synonymous.”

Mr. Clapp dealt with the cork, and sniffed the contents of the bottle. H'm sour, thin stuff ! Could he pretend to become hilarious on grocer's hock ? There might be need for hilarity, artistic clowning. Mr. Schultze was going to be shadowed.

A door opened above, and Mr. Clapp heard rustlings on the stairs.

“ Wedgewood.”

“ Yes, my dear ? ”

“ You may go up now.”

“ Thank you, Charlotte.”

“ And Wedgewood. One glass of wine should suffice. You are so easily affected.”

Mr. Clapp chuckled.

“ Unfortunately, yes, my dear. Both heart and head.”

George, busy with prep. in the "Rookery", was moved to wonder more and more why Mr. Clapp had married the lady. She was so like a hen pecking corn out of a tin, busily and brightly. And was he to be included in the party? He was not. The voice issued more instructions.

"Wedgewood."

"Yes, my dear?"

"George had better go to bed when he has done his homework."

"Afraid of George getting hilarious, Charlotte?"

"Don't be so frivolous. I don't think Herr Schultze likes children."

"Children indeed!" thought George, "old ginger cat!"

Yes, Mr. Louis Stevenson had been right. There had been no women of significance in Treasure Island. Nor in Robinson Crusoe. Mrs. Clapp would have made a nice mess of anything romantic.

III

HERR OTTO SHULTZE arrived punctually at eight. He had left a friend at the corner by Rye House.

"About ten, I expect, Adolph. Keep an eye on the two

doors. You can watch them both from that lamp post over the way."

Ellen took Herr Schultze's hat and coat and conducted him up the stairs. Mr. & Mrs. Clapp had been engaged in an argument about Mr. Clapp wearing slippers. Really, it was so unrefined and un-gentlemanly to wear slippers when a guest was expected, but Mr. Clapp had stuck to his slippers. He had reasons for adhering to them, and he had a pair of boots concealed downstairs in the "Rookery". He had warned Charlotte that he might be up rather late after Herr Schultze's departure, as he had an examination paper to prepare for the boys of the Upper First.

Herr Schultze bowed over the lady's hand. He saluted it. His fair hair had a sheen as though it had been pomarded.

"Madam, I am very happy in your charming room to be, and in your charming presence."

He straightened and looked admiringly at the lady, and Mrs. Clapp simpered.

"I assure you, we greatly regretted the postponement."

"Not more than I. How does it go, sir?"

He smiled and held out a hand to Mr. Clapp.

"It goes like clockwork, Herr Schultze, like one of those Swiss clocks that say "Cuckoo, cuckoo!"

“ Really, Wedgewood,” said his wife, “ need you be so silly ? ”

Mr. Clapp looked properly chastened. Charlotte was in control, and it was better that it should be so. Mr. Clapp was to play second fiddle, for Charlotte was in one of her rustling, preening moods. She showed herself very gracious to Herr Schultze, Herr Schultze being such a responsive person, so debonair, so suggestive of distinction and homage.

“ We have a little surprise for you, Herr Schultze.”

“ A surprise ? How kind ! ”

“ We thought you might like a little Rhine wine. Serve the Hock, Wedgewood.”

“ Rhine wine ! Madame is so understanding. Our noble river, music, wine, the Rhine maidens ! Beauty ! I adore beauty. Madame understands.”

Mrs. Clapp simpered, and breathed sentiment and silk.

It was a very musical evening, and Mr. Clapp despite his wife's frowns, drank two and a half glasses of Hock, and became absurdly merry about it. Herr Schultze, having toasted the lady, drank only a glass and a half, for it was very bad Hock. Mr. Clapp tra-la-la-ed, and patted Herr Schultze on the back, and called him “ Mr. dear fellow.” Oh,

yes, he would have to listen to a lecture from Charlotte and a dissertation on the superior polish of continental manners. Herr Schultze sang, alone and with Mr. Clapp ; Mrs. Clapp sang, and Herr Schultze was enraptured. What a pity that Mrs. Clapp had not studied in Germany, and taken her voice seriously, and given the world the pleasure of hearing her as a professional. Mrs. Clapp simpered, and became a little silly upon flattery and one glass of Hock. But at a quarter to ten Herr Schultze betrayed a smiling restlessness ; he kept glancing at the clock, and at five minutes to ten he made his adieu.

“ All charming things to an end come. Madame, I have a most beautiful evening spent.”

Mr. Clapp, full of wine and affection, shuffled down the stairs in his slippers, and helped Herr Schultze on with his hat and coat.

“ You must come again, my dear fellow. Laughter and love and life, tra-la-la.”

But directly he had closed the door on Herr Schultze, Mr. Clapp hurried into the dining room, and turning back the edge of the blind, looked from the dark room into the street. He saw Herr Schultze crossing the road diagonally towards a particular lamp post on the other side of the

Painswick road. A figure was waiting for him there, and Mr. Clapp watched the two men fade away out of the lamp-light. Ha, so the plot thickened! Mr. Clapp dived into the "Rookery", and laced on his boots.

He was making for the garden door when the domestic voice hailed him.

"Wedgewood!"

Mr. Clapp inwardly cursed.

"Yes, Charlotte?"

"Where are you going?"

"To take the dog out."

"Dog! Don't get so foolish. You drank too much Hock."

"I'm the dog, and there are lamp posts!"

How excessively vulgar of him! Mrs. Clapp slammed the door, just what Mr. Clapp had wished her to do, and with a chuckle he sidled down the passage and out into the garden. It was a dead, dark night, with no stars, and the wind was snoring in the elms. Mr. Clapp groped his way along a path to where a roller stood against the wall that separated the garden of No. 2 from the gardens of No. 1 Sussex Terrace and Rye House. Mr. Clapp had placed the roller in that particular position. He stood upon it, with his eyes level with the top of the wall.

IV

THE windows of No. 1 and of Rye House were dead windows, all save one, high up under the roof of No. 1 Sussex Terrace. A slit of light showed between the curtains, but even as Mr. Clapp watched it, the yellow streak vanished. Mr. Clapp was wondering whether other and interested persons had been observing that particular window, and whether they would manifest an interest that was active.

Now, a private passage ran along the side of the Rye House garden, and along the backs of the gardens of Sussex Terrace, and Mr. Clapp, perched on his roller, fancied that he heard voices, whispering voices on the other side of the wall. He could distinguish the black edge of it even on this obscure night, and as he watched the top of the wall he became aware of movement, a dark object breaking the continuity of the brick edge. A head ! It became more than a head ; it enlarged itself into a straddling figure. Another shape joined it, and for a second or two the vague shapes remained poised upon the wall, before dropping down into the Rye House garden. They would have a second wall to negotiate, and Mr. Clapp could just distinguish

their ascent and descent of the second obstacle. Now, they were in the garden of No. 1 Sussex Terrace, and stealing burglariously towards the house's garden door.

Mr. Clapp waited for a second or two, and then he got off the roller, and raised his voice in song. He was full of emotion ; he pealed out the Venetian Boat song. He tra-la-la-ed. And then, with rolling and alcoholic bravura, he broke into the Watch on the Rhine. He strolled up and down the path, giving forth full-throated this operatic effusion.

Two heads were close together by the garden door of No. 1.

" Der teufel " said one, " it is that drunken fool ! "

Herren Otto & Adolph hesitated. It might not be admirable to force a door or a window with that fat idiot patrolling the next garden.

" Let's wait," said Herr Schultze, " The old Tom Cat will not stay out all night."

There had been a pause in Mr. Clapp's serenade.

He was quick of hearing, and that growling German voice was audible to him. He walked along the path, and resumed his place on the roller, and without concealment.

" I spy a thief. Police, police ! "

Drunken fool ! But even an inebriated elephant

trumpeting in the stillness of the night might arouse awkward complications. Mr. Clapp saw two figures swarm over the first wall, and disappear hurriedly over the second. Mr. Clapp chuckled. He could not refrain from voicing a vale.

“ Goodnight, gentlemen, goodnight.”

V

MR. CLAPP returned to his house, and passing through it into the street, rang the bell of No. 1 Sussex Terrace. He had to wait for fully a minute before it was opened by Mr. Hyde, and Mr. Hyde had some heavy object in his hand.

“ Oh, it’s you, Mr. Clapp ! ”

“ Yes, my dear fellow, but there is no need to hit anybody on the head. I heard two Tom-cats in your garden, and I scared them off.”

“ Our dear German friends ? ”

“ Yes. I thought a word to the wise —— ”

Hyde laughed.

“ I rather expected something of the sort, and we were ready for them. I have a nice collection of false plans and figures laid out as bait.”

“ Splendid, my dear fellow, splendid. I rather think there will be no more alarums tonight.”

“ Thanks to you. I’m grateful.”

Chapter 15

IT was on the following Wednesday that Ann Hyde, watching from the upper window, saw George Gregson walking up and down and looking pathetically at the door of No. 1. It was George's Wednesday half-holiday, and he had hoped to spend it with Rachel, but Rachel was in bed with a feverish cold, and George waited in vain. Ann took pity on the child, and going downstairs, opened the door, and called to him.

"I'm sorry, dear, Rachel can't come out today."

George pulled off his cap.

"I do hope, Mrs. Hyde, she's not ill."

"Just a cold, George. She's in bed."

"I'm so sorry. Do you think she would like some sweets or a donut?"

"You mustn't spend your money, dear."

"Uncle James came and took me out to dinner yesterday. He gave me half a crown."

"That's the right kind of uncle, George."

"Rather. I may buy Rachel some sweets, Mrs. Hyde, mayn't I?"

"Well, let us say three pennyworth."

"I'll leave them presently, with my love."

She smiled on him, and closed the door on his little freckled face. A nice child this, and good for Rachel. Mrs. Hyde went back to her window, and George made his way to his favourite sweet-shop, avoiding Highbury Grove, because the Yarbury boys might waylay him. He was afraid of these truculent louts and he hated being afraid ; it was shame to his young, sensitive self-love, and shame to the small lover in him, but George was a wise child. Why tempt provocation, when, by exercising discretion you could avoid odds that were both impossible and humiliating ? Achilles might challenge all the champions of Troy, but the Yarbury boys were not Trojans, gentlemenly heroes after the tradition of Homer.

But George was to be both in luck and out of it. He had brought his sweet offering, three pennyworth of peppermint creams, partly because he liked them, and Rachel liked them, and they were supposed to be good for a cold, and he had stuffed one into his mouth. He heard strains of music as he opened the shop door. He reached the pavement, and saw the same German band grouped in the roadway about fifty yards from the shop. But George saw something else, the two Yarbury boys leaning against the railings and listening to the band. George acted swiftly.

He dashed across the road, and into The Fields by a side gate which happily was near. He peeked through the railings and saw the Yarbury boys mocking the band, Bob pretending to play the trombone, Sydney the flute. Distance from such savages seemed important. There happened to be a large, rustic shelter or summer-house on the opposite side of the Fields, and George made for it. He found it empty, and slipping inside, sat down, with his bag of sweets on his knees.

George helped himself to another peppermint. Surely, such additional stimulus was justified? And then, to his disgust, he saw the Yarbury boys enter by the same gate that had served him. If they caught him in this trap, his bag of sweets would be plundered and he might be made to turn out his pockets. Again, George acted quickly. He slipped out of the summer-house, and in among the shrubs, and took cover behind the building.

The Yarbury boys had not spotted him, but George could not be sure of that. He chose to play for safety, and stood listening for the sound of those throaty, arrogant voices; both the Yarbury boys talked as though they had marbles in their mouths. George had no watch to tell him how the time passed; his father had promised him a Waterbury watch for

Christmas. Was it safe to scout round the corner of the summerhouse ? George was about to dare it, when he heard other voices.

There were men's voices, and they were speaking a foreign language. Was it German ? George knew a little German, Mr. Clapp refreshed himself at time by giving George German conversation lessons on the walk to school. George held his breath. He was sure that he recognised one of the voices, that of Herr Schultze. Were the men making for the summerhouse ? They were. George heard them enter, and the creaking of their seat as they sat down.

Golly, this was a secret rendezvous !

Herr Schultze and his friend conversed. No doubt it seemed to them a safe corner for such confidences. How tantalising for George ! He managed to pick up a word here and there. Herr Schultze was speaking with peculiar emphasis. Das Madchem ! What did that mean ? Little girl. Then Herr Schultze used a particular word. Stehlen. Stehlen ? It sounded like steal. Herr Schultze's friend appeared worried by the word. Abduct Hyde's small daughter, and hold her ransom ? Wasn't that too dangerous ?

George heard someone thumping the seat. Herr Schultze

was in a truculent mood. Herr Adolph asked a question. What was the girl's name. Rachel. George's ears tingled. What was the black, bad business these two men were discussing ? George began to be frightened. He was thinking less and less of Herr Schultze's ingratiating smile, and more and more of those canine teeth. Herr Schultze was a wolf. He might be as dangerous and as ruthless as old Silver in Treasure Island if he caught a boy listening to his secret plans.

George's impulse was to bolt for it, but he restrained that impulse. The Yarbury boys had become very small beer. He dared not move, or even try to sidle more deeply in among the shrubs, lest the brushing of the twigs should betray him. This, indeed, was unadulterated adventure, and Georgie was not quite sure whether the actual experience was as pleasant as it sounded in books. His nose began to tickle. Horrors, he was not going to sneeze ! He crooked a first finger and pressed it against his nose and upper lip. His other hand clutched the bag of sweets.

Suddenly the voices ceased. The seat creaked. George heard Herr Schultze say something sharp and scornful to his friend. It was like the voice of a schoolmaster denouncing a boy for cribbing. George held his breath. He

heard footsteps of the gravel, footsteps that were passing away, but George remained hidden for fully a minute. Then, he crept along the back of the summerhouse and peered round it. He saw nothing but a man throwing a stick for a dog on the grass beyond the path.

George's legs went flashing homewards. He ran down to the bottom of the fields, and so to Highbury Corner. His urge was to reach Sussex Terrace and tell Mr. Clapp.

II

FORTUNE favoured him. George was passing Charrington's Coal Office just outside the gates when he ran into Mr. Clapp swinging along with characteristic bravura.

"Hallo, my lad, whither away? And what's in the bag?"

"Peppermint creams, Mr. Clapp."

"I'll have one."

George held out the sweets, and Mr. Clapp, removing a glove, dipped thumb and finger into the bag. But the child was looking serious. His lips were quivering as though someone had frightened him. The Yarbury boys? Mr. Clapp knew all about the Yarbury boys, and was waiting for an opportunity to exercise himself upon them.

“ What is it George ? ”

“ I’ve got something terrible to tell you, sir.”

“ Good heavens, does the plot thicken ? ”

“ Herr Schultze and another gentleman. Over there in the summerhouse. I heard them talking.”

Mr. Clapp took George by the hand.

“ I was going to do some Christmas shopping, Georgie. We’ll take a stroll in the Fields. Now then, unbosom.”

“ Does madchen mean little girl ? ”

“ It does, George.”

“ And a word that sounds like steal. Stehlen. Is that German for stealing ? ”

“ It is, George. But, great, Scott, G.G. you mean to say you heard Herr Schultze using these words ? ”

“ Yes, I did, Mr. Clapp.”

“ Then how did it all happen ? ”

George described his adventure with a truthfulness that did him credit, even confessing to his flight from the Yarbury boys, and giving as his reason his desire to save his pocket-money and his sweets. Mr. Clapp, with a mouth now empty of peppermint cream, said, “ Ha, these louts ! I think, George, that some day we will lay an ambuscade for those two young gentlemen — go on. So, Herr Schultze and

his friend thought the place safe for confidences."

George explained how he happened to be behind the summer-house instead of in it. He said that Herr Schultze had appeared to be in bad temper and had spoken rudely and sharply to his companion.

"Ha," said Mr. Clapp again, "and was there a German band anywhere about?"

"O, yes, I'd forgotten that. It was playing over there by the houses when I came out of the sweet-shop."

"And you are sure of these two words, George?"

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Clapp laid a large hand on the crown of George Gregson's head.

"Admirable. You have done very well, George. You deserve a decoration. Not a word to anybody."

Mr. Clapp swept George round with a hand on his head.

"I have some shopping to do. I'll hurry through it and get home in half an hour."

"Can I go now, sir?"

"Ha, the sweets!"

"I bought them for Rachel. She's in bed with a cold."

"Homage to the fair, George. I applaud. I'm sorry I purloined one of the lady's sweets. I applaud. Yes, run

along home, and wait for me in the Rookery. Ah, but the Yarbury boys ! You had better come with me and I'll convoy you."

Upper Street seemed very much Upper Street that day to Georgie Gregson. He passed the soldier-shop without a qualm, for Mr. Clapp had praised him, and Upper Street was full of Christmas and adventure. They reached the high pavement by Rackstraw's & Roberts, and across the broad roadway windows were beginning to glimmer behind the winter lace of a row of limes. The day might be grey, and dim with the early dusk, but the shop windows were alive, and George was a healthy child. Orange, dates, candied fruit, Christmas crackers, tubs of butter, cubes of cheese, hams, sausages, mincemeat in glass jars. Upper Street had a Christmas flavour ; the drapers windows were in full flower.

Mr. Clapp led George into Messrs. Roberts. Mr. Clapp had a vulgar indiscretion to efface, and a little pinchback goddess to placate. Dogs and lamp posts ! How very vulgar of him ! A new Christmas hat was indicated, but Mr. Clapp was not going to choose that hat. God forbid ! He lumbered along to the hat and bonnet department, and blew his nose, and looked shy.

" Yes, sir what can I show you ? "

" Nothing," said Mr. Clapp ; " I am no judge of hats."

The shop girl simpered.

" What department, sir, do you —— ? "

" Hats, for my wife, half a dozen for her to choose from."

" I see, sir, on appro ? "

" Precisely. Is it possible ? "

" Of course, sir."

" Let us say a dozen. No, perhaps six. Too promiscuous. I'll give you the address. Mrs. Clapp, No.2 Sussex Terrace. Any deposit needed ? "

" Oh, no, sir. Mrs. Clapp is a regular customer. I have served her myself."

" Splendid," said Mr. Clapp, and rolled off and out with an air of great relief, and not realising that the unknown maiden was sorry for him. Did she know Mrs. Clapp ? Cats and canaries, but she did, a lady who had half the hats in the shop planted upon her head, and who minced and grumbled and treated you as though you were less than a kitchen-maid. Poor Mr. Clapp !

Mr. Clapp made other purchases in Upper Street, a briar pipe, a box of chocolates, a pound of Stilton cheese, a pair of gloves for somebody, a little silver rose-bowl for Aunt

Eliza. Aunt Eliza was Mr. Clapp's hope, nor was his affection wholly mercenary. Aunt Eliza was the one person who said what she thought to Charlotte, and Charlotte did not dare to sauce her. Aunt Eliza had money, and Josiah Wedgewood was her particular pet. Mr. Clapp gave George the pair of gloves and the Stilton cheese to carry, and groping in a pocket, brought out the new pipe. It was curved and glossy and of the colour of rich chestnut, and it had an amber mouthpiece, and was beautifully straight in the grain. Mr. Clapp eyed it lovingly.

“ Know how to choose a pipe, George ? ”

“ No, sir.”

“ Rather like choosing a wife. A'hem. Not for babes and sucklings. Straight in the grain or leg, and wide and gentle of eye, a kind mouth-piece. Yes, a present from Aunt Eliza.”

Aunt Eliza had written to him and enclosed a postal order. “ Buy yourself a pipe, Josh.” Yes, just Josh ! Aunt Eliza was one of the few women who understood that the purchasing of a pipe was a sacred business, a matter of personal prejudice. Why did you like a particular pipe the first time you smoked it ? Because it was cool, because the occasion was happy, because it was not a bald-headed,

brittle bitch of a shrew ? Well, well, well ! Aunt Eliza was a comfortable person. She enjoyed life and her food and a naughty story. When she laughed she quivered like a jelly. And when she came to London to stay, Josiah Wedgewood did not take her to St. Paul's, or Westminster Abbey, or the National Gallery ; he took her to a music-hall, the Oxford or the Empire, and to Gatties for a grill and a glass of stout, or to the Zoo, or to see Ellen Terry. Charlotte thought Aunt Eliza a very vulgar old woman but dared not say so to her face, for Aunt Eliza was leaving Wedgewood her money.

Now, George had a secret confession to make, and he made it to Mr. Clapp while they were walking down the Canonbury Road.

“ It's Christmas in a fortnight.”

“ Yes, George.”

“ I wrote to mother yesterday. I asked her if Rachel might come for Christmas.”

“ Did you, by Jove ! Rather forward and sudden of you, George, but it's an idea. Do you see the idea, now, after what you over-heard ? ”

“ Golly,” said George, “ of course ! They wouldn't know where she was, would they ? ”

“ Exactly, my child. The hero carries the heroine to his tower in the woods ! Not a word, George, not a word.”

When they arrived at No. 2 Sussex Terrace, Mr. Clapp opened the door with care, and depositing his parcels on the hat-stand glove-box, winked at George and drew him out to the doorstep. Mr. Clapp closed the door with equal care. One of life's games was the eluding of Charlotte's questions. Mrs. Clapp had an infantile mind, and an insatiable curiosity. Mr. Clapp glanced at the bag of sweets. Had they absorbed the perfume of the Stilton ?

“ Smell them, George.”

“ What for, Mr. Clapp ? ”

“ Does the bag smell of cheese ? ”

George put the bag to his nose, and gave a shake of the head.

“ No, sir.”

“ Good. Mustn't spoil their bouquet for a lady.”

Mr. Clapp rang the bell of No.1, and stood like John Bull confronting the world. Let those Germans sneak round the corner. Herr Schultze would be none the worse for having those fangs knocked out of his hard Prussian face. Scratch a Russian and you uncovered the Tartar, and in a Prussian you discovered the Hun. People with flat, tight faces, and

ice-age eyes. George was looking up at his hero.

“ Do I come in too, Mr. Clapp ? ”

“ Yes, George. Let the offering be presented to the lady of the house. And, you are an important witness. I think Mr. Hyde would like to hear from your own innocent lips —
— . George, you are not romancing ? ”

“ Oh, no, Mr. Clapp.”

“ Swear by the sacred name of Rachel.”

“ It’s all true, Mr. Clapp, it is, really.”

“ George, I believe you.”

III

MRS. HYDE answered the bell. She saw George’s freckled face, and the paper bag ; and the supposition was that George had called to present his offering. Mr. Clapp had raised his hat and stood with his head uncovered, a very perfect knight though he was growing bald. He murmured to himself “ Botticelli,” and added “ Just a touch of Rosetti,” and Mrs. Hyde glanced at his with oblique shyness.

“ I beg your pardon ? ”

"I am the offender, madam. One should not mumble in one's beard."

George proffered his bag.

"They're for Rachel, but pra'ps you'd like one."

"Thank you, dear. It is very sweet of you."

"Sweets to the sweet, madam. Is your husband in?"

"I'm afraid he is in his — I mean, working."

"Forgive me, it is rather important."

Mr. Clapp saw the pupils of her very dark eyes grow big. Fear! Why should there be fear in the world, save for the animal crowd who needed the goad? Mr. Clapp caressed the crown of his bowler hat.

"Yes, somewhat important. Not alarming, I assure you, because we happen to be on the right side of fate. And George is the hero, the Sherlock, and I am mere Watson."

She looked into Mr. Clapp's eyes, as though unsure of certain things, and then she smiled, and Josiah Wedgewood fell in love with her as George had fallen in love with the daughter.

"Thank you. Please come in."

She stood back, and Mr. Clapp stepped in with his hand on George's head. He noticed that she looked swiftly to right and left before she closed the door, as though she were the

dear, dark guardians of her husband's fate. Mr. Clapp, with sudden absent-mindedness, planted his very large hat on George's head. It extinguished him like a Coeur de Lion helmet.

" Oh, sir ! "

" Dear me, lights out, George. Never mind. Hang the casque up for me."

Chapter 16

GEORGE was surprised at the ease in which these three grown-ups were able to understand each other, and to arrange things with no more than a look and a word. How was it that they were so quick in solving some human puzzle, where other folk would have continued to argue and declaim and recapitulate ? Mrs. Clapp would go on nibbling at a lettuce leaf that was never consumed, and was it not notorious, even to George, that good people could stand in doorways and chant that almost universal refrain, " And I says to her, I says, yes, I says, and what I says is, etc. etc." Was it just the difference between smug stupidity and a sensitive and receptive intelligence, the silly sheep and the sheep-dog ?

For, when Mrs. Hyde brought Mr. Hyde downstairs, the two men looked at each other and at the lady and Mrs. Hyde, smiling suddenly upon George, proposed that he should present his sweets in person.

" Would you like to, dear ? "

What a question, but wasn't it just part of the stage-play ?

" May I ? "

“ I’ll take you up. You mustn’t go too near Rachel, and catch her cold.”

“ I don’t mind if I do,” said George.

“ But I do, my lad,” said Mr. Clapp ; “ What about Christmas and turkey and plum-pudding ? ”

Mrs. Hyde and George went upstairs, the two men into the fireless dining room. The fire was laid but not lighted, and John Hyde bent down and put a match to it.

“ Well, what’s the latest sensation, Clapp ? ”

“ To kidnap your daughter.”

Hyde, squatting on his heels, turned sharply on his toes, looking like a fierce animal crouched for a spring.

“ Good God, man, how do you know that ? ”

“ It is thanks to George.”

“ That boy always seems in the picture. But how ? ”

Mr. Clapp sat down and filled his new pipe, and described to John Hyde George’s latest adventure. Yes, of course Schultze and his friend had been speaking in German, but Georgie Gregson knew a little German. He had hung on to those two very significant and sinister words, *madchen* and *stehlen*.

Hyde straightened and reached for a pipe.

“ Are you sure the kid isn’t romancing ? Kids do.”

“ I know, my dear fellow, but I am convinced that George is telling the truth.”

“ Nice people, the Germans ! ”

“ Hogs, my dear sir, hogs. But let us consider the salient points and the probabilities. I don't think a small boy would be likely to invent such nastiness.”

“ It depends —— ”

“ On the boy ? Quite, George is an imaginative but truthful child. Just consider. Isn't the idea logical, the kind of idea that would occur to such people ? It would put a trump card into their hands, give them a hold over you that —— ”

“Yes, damn them.”

“ Supposed they managed to smuggle the child out of the country, and themselves as well, they would be in a very strong position. They could say “ Now, Mr. Hyde, what about it ? Are you ready to exchange your information for your child ? If not —— ! ”

“ Yes, damn them,” said Hyde, filling his pipe with fierce fingers.

Mr. Clapp rubbed the bowl of his new pipe reflectively against his nose, and then considered its lovely gloss and grain. Mr. Clapp's nose was inclined to shininess, and oil

was good for a pipe, especially for a new one. Now, what was Hyde going to make of this business ? What was to be done with the child ? Had not the universal George himself suggested a solution ? But was that solution socially practical ?

Hyde was staring at the fire, and lighting his pipe.

“ As a man of the world, Clapp, doesn't this all sound rather fantastic to you ? ”

“ Not in the latest, my dear fellow. Psychologically, the Schultze plan is brutally efficient. I take it that you can neither be bribed, bought, nor threatened. Even if they hit you on the head, or abducted you, they might be no nearer the prize. But —— ”

“ Yes, I see that. It's so thoroughly German, and Germanly thorough. I have had to dodge them before. Another vanishing act.”

“ Is that necessary ? ”

“ Just how, not necessary ? ”

“ Well, if the child is safe, out of reach, that piece of nastiness won't work.”

“ One can't keep a kid shut up indefinitely.”

“ Of course not. Send her away.”

“ And supposing this house is watched, as probably it

is ? ”

“ Smuggle her away.”

“ Where to ? Fact is, Clapp, I’m stony, and there’s a sort of beastly pride in me.”

“ G.G. suggested a solution, even if it be only a temporary one.”

“ That kid again ! ”

“ Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings ! Well, why not ? George has confessed to me that he has asked his parents to invite Rachel for Christmas.”

“ The little beggar has some cheek ! ”

“ No, only an innocent passion.”

“ But I don’t know the people. I can’t be under an obligation to strangers.”

“ In a crisis, why not ? ”

“ Where do they live ? ”

“ Place called Southend on Sea, Thames estuary.”

“ Who and what is Gregson ? ”

“ A doctor. I can assure you that they are very likeable people. Gregson’s a tough fellow, with some colour in him, the kind of man, I imagine, who if he knew —— ”

“ You mean that I should confide in these strangers ? ”

“ Why not ? Or friends might do it for you.”

They could hear footsteps in the room above, and a sudden smile softened Hyde's face.

" You know, Clapp, when one has a very large bee in one's bonnet as I have, one is apt to be such a mass of churlish egoism that —— Oh, well, let's have the boy and my wife down."

" One moment, my dear fellow, shall we cut the grass and roll the garden path, and have everything swept and tidy ? The boy has written home. What will be the result of that letter ? Nothing perhaps, or a tactful refusal. Now, how can one persuade the situation to be human and yet inevitable ? You are an expert in the study of prime movers. What is the most potent force in human relationships ? "

" Greed."

" Oh, come now, you don't believe that."

Hyde gave a sardonic jerk of the head.

" Perhaps, not wholly so ! "

" Emotion, I like, or I don't like. Compassion. Now, look here, I happen to know that Mrs. Gregson is coming up next week for Christmas shopping. She'll take George out. I'll get the boy half a day off. George can talk about Rachel."

" Why should a woman be interested in someone else's brat

?”

“ Why does the earth revolve ? Instead of pushing and pulling, let us allow nature to work in her own way.”

“ Leave things to the universal George ? ”

“ Well, one might add a little pinch of spice to the pudding. I might.”

“ You ? ”

“ A Sunday pilgrimage, a breath of sea air. Meanwhile, keep the child in the house. Talk it over with your wife. I'll take George home.”

II

MR. CLAPP did not tell John Hyde that in proposing to do this most unconventional thing he had other and concealed cards under the table. Mr. Clapp, like most of the romantics, liked to mix matter with mystery, and he preferred a colour picture to an etching. Now, as a matter of fact, Aunt Eliza lived at Southend of Sea, and not three doors from Dr. Gregson ; she was a patient of Dr. Gregson's, and that was how George had come to be a boarder at No. 2 Sussex Terrace. Mr. Clapp told his wife that he was going down to Southend on the Sunday to see Aunt Eliza, for Aunt

Eliza wished to consult him on some business matters. Charlotte could not deny Josiah Wedgewood the right to visit his aunt, nor could she pester him as to the why and the wherefore, and since Mrs. Clapp did not love Aunt Eliza, she did not suggest that she could accompany Josiah Wedgewood to Southend. Mrs. Clapp would take George Gregson to St. Barnabas church, and see that he did not fidget during the sermon. It would be George's duty to learn the Collect for the day, and after tea Mrs. Clapp would hear him repeat it. George loathed Collects, and Mr. Clapp was apt to be careless about them.

Mr. Clapp sent Aunt Eliza a telegram. Aunt Eliza, when she had read it, rang for her cook. "Mr. Josh will be with us to lunch on Sunday, Jane. Roast beef and Yorkshire pudding, mince pies, and Welsh rarebit, and see that the beef is Christmas beef." Aunt Eliza knew her Josiah. He liked good food, and so did she. He had a palate for old sherry, and claret and port, and Aunt Eliza got out her cellar key and a candle and went and foraged. Josiah's telegram had said — "Wish to consult you on a very interesting problem. Love. Josh." Dear Josh, he always was interesting, and he made her laugh, and he enjoyed her food and her wine, and never touted for favours. Why he had

married that jaundiced canary —— !

It was one of those gentle, sunny days which an English winter produces before suddenly scarifying your face with a furious north-easter, when Mr. Clapp took the 11.5 from Fenchurch Street. Even the dastardly ugliness of Stepney and Plaistow and the Hams was hazed and softened. Smoke silvered itself against a tenuous blue sky. Mr. Clapp could never gaze upon the Essex Flats without comparing the descent of Father Thames with the cold and shimmering aloofness of old age. Dead eyes, laughter that was only a senile cackle, no emotion, no illusions. Mr. Clapp preferred the great river in its more green and wooded Monets, Lechlade, Henley, Marlow. Was there anything romantic about Tilbury, save that Queen Bess had spoken resounding words there to the men of England ? Yet the old river, even its decline to the sea, had a greatness when you steamed down it, and saw the wealth of the world coming and going. Memories of galleons, and East Indiamen, and the King's ships lying at the Nore. The Danes and the Dutch had pulled old Father Thames' beard. Benfleet, Hadleigh Castle, Leigh and its fishermen. Mr. Clapp always felt happier when the estuary began to spread itself, and the land to recover some of its rolling pride. Over yonder lay

Kent, Kent with its cherry orchards and the white cliffs of Albion, Kent the gateway to the great beyond.

Mr. Clapp walked down Southend High Street to the Royal Hotel, and turning to the right along Royal Terrace, felt suddenly good and hungry and happy. These little old Georgian houses had atmosphere. They made you wonder about things and people. They were not like the new, genteel, yellow brick villas about whose inmates you did not care a damn. Mr. Clapp was puckish about such places. He wanted to say to them "Caper sauce and hard boiled eggs to you, tripe, and a chill on the liver !"

Aunt Eliza was waiting for him by the drawing-room fire, amid all her china and her pictures, and with Sam her bull-terrier at her feet. The two French windows, shaded by the green roof of the balcony framed a green garland and a grey, sun flecked sea. The pier reached out like a huge black tentacle as though to grab some of those ships which passed to and fro. Aunt Eliza knew at once when Josh was in the house ; it was like a sea-captain coming aboard with rolling bulk and a breezy voice. The stairs creaked ; Sam cocked an ear and rose from the hearthrug and grinned at his mistress. Good business, here's the beloved buccaneer !

Mr. Clapp came in, with a little parcel in his hand, and

Aunt Eliza, beaming upon him, was kissed on both cheeks, and Sam, wagging a whip of a tail, rubbed his muzzle against Josiah's leg.

" Well, my dear, is that the problem ? "

" No, a presentation, Aunt Liz, to add to the collection."

" You naughty boy ! Shall I guess ? "

" Go ahead. Bristol, or Bow, or Chelsea ? "

" Bristol."

" What a woman ! Knocks off a cocoanut at the first shot ! "

" Thank you, my dear. The sherry is on the side-table."

" Harvey ? "

" Yes."

" Bristol again ! Ye gods ! I've spoilt church for you, Aunt Liz."

" A nice excuse, Josh. Charlotte is seeing to the world's morals, I expect."

" I am sure she is."

" Trilling ' holy, holy, holy '. I'm a naughty old woman, Josh."

" Ha," said Josiah, " give me more of that naughtiness."

Mr. Clapp poured out a glass of sherry for his aunt, and carried it to her ; she was undoing the parcel, and Sam was sniffing at the brown paper. "Not for you, my dear." Aunt

Eliza had a blue bow in her lace cap, and a gold chain strung across her plump bosom. "Oh, Josh, how exquisite!" She had uncovered a long, slim wine glass in twisted opal, and she held it up to the light.

"Just what I wanted to complete the collection."

She fingered it lovingly.

"Christen it, my dear."

"Then you must. Give me that glass. I'll fill the Bristol Channel for you!"

Seated on either side of the fire, with Sam on the hearthrug, and sipping their sherry, they smiled upon each other.

"Sam had any more battles?"

"I'm afraid so. Disgraceful Sam! What about poor Canon Herbert's retriever?"

Sam whipped a tail on the floor and grinned.

"Disgraceful! A dignity of the Church! And you know you loved it, Aunt Liz."

"Well, rather a bumptious beast. And now, my dear, what's the problem?"

"You won't guess right this time."

"Shan't I?"

"Quite fantastic, and a little macabre. You may think me

a silly ass for mixing myself up in it."

"And am I to be mixed up in it?"

"Possibly."

"Then, it has nothing to do with Charlotte."

"Charlotte is neither fantastic nor macabre."

"Poor Charlotte! Well, begin, Josh. The sherry is warming my curiosity."

"I never heard one's tummy called that before! Your very good health, Aunt Liz."

"And yours, my dear."

Meanwhile, on this December Sunday, Mr. Clapp sang the song of George and Rachel, of Ann & John Hyde, of Herr Schultze and the Pursuit of Power, of Uncle Jimmy and the Rye House Plot. George and Rachel were the principal figures in the pantomime, the veritable Babes in the wood, and though Mr. Clapp told his story with phantasy and playfulness, he caused a little shadow of tragedy to obscure the horizon. Thunder off stage, the wailing of wind in the chimney. Aunt Eliza listened spell-bound, and fingered her gold chain, and her face became the face of a round-eyed child.

"Well, there you are, Aunt Liz. Tears, idle tears, and man's tantrums and tempests. Let me help you to some more

sherry."

Aunt Eliza took a second glass, and so did Josiah Wedgewood.

"Is this all true, Josh?"

"Utterly and strangely true. Don't you believe that such things can happen?"

"In respectable Canonbury?"

"No place is so utterly respectable as all that, and God be thanked for it. The wolf can prowl in placid Islington, and Jack the Ripper cut the throats of ——"

"Yes, my dear. Our George seems to be a very bright child. And just how?"

"Enter the fairy godmother."

"Be more explicit, Josh."

"Persuade the Gregsons to humour George."

"And supposing?"

"Take Rachel yourself. But I somehow feel that there ought to be a man about the place. These German gentlemen appear to be unpleasantly in earnest. Not that I question your capacity to confront even that old blackguard Bismarck."

Aunt Eliza gave him an ironic bow.

"Thank you, my dear. Am I, like the Germans, to lie when

it suits me, and to be grossly shocked and indignant when the other fellow plays the same game ? ”

“ Just be Aunt Eliza.”

Dinner was announced, one of Janet’s famous Sunday dinners, fragrant with sirloin of beef and gravy, and golden with Yorkshire pudding that both crackled and was buttery and succulent.

Josiah Wedgewood and Aunt Eliza enjoyed the good meat, and the warm Burgundy, and the mince-pies, and the Welsh rarebit, and Aunt Eliza agreed to take a hand in the game.

“ After tea, Josh, and when you have gone, I shall suffer from a slight sense of discomfort. I shall send for Dr. Gregson.”

Mr. Clapp raised his glass to her.

“ Queen Elizabeth takes the stage.”

III

DR. GREGSON did not feel peeved when, soon after five o’clock a note was delivered to him from Miss Eliza Clapp. She had allowed him his Sabbath post-prandial nap and his tea, and was preventing him from going to church and listening to a rambling and ridiculous sermon. Moreover,

Dr. Gregson and Aunt Eliza were fast friends who enjoyed each other's jocund vitality, and who could laugh at life and particularly so at its priggeries. So, Dr. Gregson put on his top-hat, and walked the twenty yards from No. 11 to No. 16.

He found Miss Clapp reading "Lorna Doone", and looking extremely unsick.

"So sorry to trouble you, Doctor, on Sunday."

"You don't look at all sorry."

"You unsympathetic fellow! As a matter of fact, I'm not."

"Nothing like candour! I have never seen you looking better."

"Josh has been down to see me."

Dr. Gregson took the chair on the other side of the fire.

"A tonic person. So, what is the trouble?"

Miss Clapp fingered her gold chain.

"Do you feel like being a fellow conspirator?"

"I?"

"Yes, father and son together. I think you have received a letter from Georgie."

"Mary has. The boy wants us to ask a small girl for Christmas."

"And shall you?"

“ We are going to Lincolnshire for Christmas. Gates is carrying on.”

“ Dear, dear, what a nuisance ! Holbeach again ? ”

“ Yes, pork pie and cheese cakes, and some rough shooting.”

“ So you won't ask the child ? ”

“ Why should we ? A complete stranger.”

“ And poor Georgie so much in love again ! ”

“ That boy's amorous propensities are going to be a problem.”

“ Were yours ? ”

“ Well, not if one marries a Mary. But may I ask why you are so interested ? ”

“ Shall I tell you a story. It's really quite exciting, much more so than one of Cannon Herbert's sermons.”

“ I should hope so. Not a professional occasion ? ”

“ But you can charge me a fee.”

“ Fudge,” said Dr. Gregson.

Dr. Gregson had reached that state when a man begins to be incipiently wise in knowing how little he may be able to control even the trivialities of life. Things happen fortuitously without your meaning them to happen, and the things that you mean to happen in a particular way, either

do not happen at all, or happen differently. What was this strange hotch-potch that the old lady was stirring ? It had every appearance of being absurd, rank melodrama, stuff from the " Adelphi ", and yet Dr. Gregson was saying to himself, " O, yes, she'll have her way, and when I tell Mary, Mary will be on the side of the angels. I shall be co-opted into the show as a kind of male-nurse and tame policemen. And what will Yankee Doodle say ? " Yankee Doodle being Miss Amelia Bailey, his aunt at Holbeach, " Damn young George ! "

Aunt Eliza was looking flushed and animated, a fairy god-mother ruffling it in black silk. Her lace cap had a jaunty tilt.

" Well, and what do you say ? "

" What mere man always says."

" I'm too busy to be bothered."

" An excuse that is quite useless. I suppose we shall take the brat."

" And Mary will write to Mrs. Hyde ? "

" Inevitably so. I don't want to lose a good patient."

" And the children will be able to kiss under the mistletoe. I will pay for the girl's ticket."

Dr. Gregson had his diagnostic look.

“ I suppose one of us ought to go up and call on this Mrs. Hyde. It should be Mary. She has a Christmas shopping show on Wednesday.”

“ Well, let it be Mary.”

Chapter 17

DR. CORRIE GREGSON was the typical islander, in that it was difficult for him to take international jealousies and malignities with proper seriousness. Did not the English Channel lie between this blessed island and those less fortunate folk who had frontiers, a mere line of posts to separate their mutual prejudices and greeds ? The English were seamen, players of games, pioneers ; they had gone all over the world, and in their easy, hearty way taken to themselves a fair part of it. The Englishman had a good " Seat " on that troublesome nag " Conscience ", and could persuade her to go the way he pleased. The old, spacious, sporting, " Give them the Bible & Bayonet " spirit survived, though the new proletariat was becoming a rather sinister problem. No Englishman expected to be knifed in the back. He was still the boxer, head up, smiling, contemptuous of French artifice, and not yet awake to the flat faced, shaven headed appetites and envies of the Teuton. He took life easily ; was unsuspicious, and did not trouble much about his Secret Service, or about foreign lingos, and was prone to laugh at other people who seriously believed in plots and propaganda, and in a

philosophy that was founded upon elemental hates, and savageries. The English were not interested in mass-murder, or in a diplomacy that depended upon original falsehood for the furtherance of its designs.

Dr. Gregson returned to No. 11 in a mood of tolerant scepticism. Georgie's mother was at church, and Dr. Gregson sat down in front of the fire with a novel by Thomas Hardy, and the hope that the door-bell would not ring. He liked to take his Sunday supper in peace, with a glass of stout, and then to lounge in front of the fire and smoke and gossip with Mary. All was allowed him on this particular evening, though his summing up of the situation was crystallised in the phrase, "It is just a question of pleasing the old lady."

Possibly, he was surprised to discover a receptive seriousness in his wife's attitude. When he had told her this very tall story she sat and gazed at the fire, and seemed to be envisaging things tragical, whereas his mood was all for comedy.

"Don't you believe it, Corrie?"

"Hardly."

"Miss Clapp is not quite a fool."

"It's Josiah's story. Some people like to be credulous."

“ I agree with Miss Clapp. We ought to take the child.”

“ Georgie’s latest inamorata ! ”

“ Children sometimes see where we are blind. You want me to go and call on the Hydes ? ”

“ Well, one ought to get a glimpse of the people. Hyde may be the most utter charlatan.”

“ And he may be a genius.”

“ There is that remote possibility.”

“ Don’t be so sceptical. You’re too English, Corrie.”

“ Thanks. That’s a compliment.”

“ I’m not so sure. You have never been abroad since your six months as a ship’s doctor.”

“ True, oh, Queen.”

“ Mr. Clapp has. He may have more feeling for, what shall we call it ? ”

“ The immoralities of Paris ! ”

“ Don’t be so dreadfully complacent.”

There were times when Dr. Gregson was moved by his wife’s candour. He was still very much John Bull, high coloured and ready to put his fists up.

“ Bosh, my dear ! A doctor has to consider the evidence, and I diagnose a mare’s nest.”

“ I would like to look into your mare’s nest. I will take

George out on Wednesday, and then go up to Canonbury and see the Hydes. I had better write to the child's mother."

"What line are you going to take?"

"Just the simple truth. George wants Rachel to spend Christmas with us. Is that so unbelievably ridiculous?"

II

GEORGIE GREGSON legged it across the asphalt playground towards the porter's lodge. He was wearing his Sunday clothes, with the exception of a top-hat, and in its place his head carried a soft grey felt, a compromise for such un-Sabbath occasions. George was sensitive about this hat. He hated it. The thing had no romance, and made him look an ass. Thank the Lord he had the great square to himself, but as he passed the cloisters he saw a figure flash out from the porter's lodge. Young Barter had been sent by his form-master to purchase a couple of fives balls, and young Barter was a dreadful quiz, and one of George's enemies. As they neared each other a smirk spread over Master Barter's face, and George went red.

"Silly, isn't it?" said he, defensively.

"Silly, what?"

“ My hat.”

Young Barter’s smirk became a grin.

“ Pork-pie gone mouldy.”

“ Shut up, it’s not as bad as all that.”

“ Going out with mumsie ! Ta-ta, kid.”

George felt hot and humbled. Why had Mrs. Clapp insisted upon him wearing that hat ? He passed out of the main gate and across Carthusian Square into Aldersgate Street. The rendezvous was the Civil Service Stores in Queen Victoria Street where his mother would be waiting for him at the main entrance. Why should he not ask his mother if he could cease from wearing this hat ? Assuredly, the helmet of Ivanhoe had not suggested pork-pie gone mouldy ? But when he saw his mother waiting at the top of the steps, George forgot his hat. The Civil Service Stores was a palace of delight to him, and his mother looked so happy and so pretty. What did young Barter matter in a world of wavy auburn hair, and kind eyes, and sausage rolls and jam tarts, and Christmas presents ? And he was going to tell his mother about Rachel.

“ Am I late, mother ? ”

She bent and kissed him.

“ No, darling. Shall we lunch first ? There is such a

crowd."

" Oh, yes, let's," said George, and they climbed the stairs to the restaurant.

The whole world seemed to be shopping. Through glass doors George had glimpses of Christmas crackers and other delights. They found a table and George's particular waitress, a tall dark girl with a friendly smile. She remembered George, and she remembered his propensities.

" Sausage roll for the young gentleman ? "

" Two, please," said George. " May I, mother ? "

" Yes, dear."

" And raspberry jam tarts ? "

" You do remember," said George.

" Faces as well as food, sir."

Now what, did she mean by that ?

George's eyes were, in the vulgar parlance, all over the place, on his plate, his mother's face, the people at the other tables, the Christmas cakes on the shelves behind the serving counter. Someone at the next table was eating raspberry tart, and the desire for raspberry tart awoke in George Gregson.

" Did you get my letter, mother ? "

Mrs. Gregson, who was eating beefsteak pie, divined the

human moment and seized it.

“ Yes, dear. We are going to Holbeach for Christmas. Your father needs a holiday.”

George looked dash, and for the moment forgot his sausage-roll. Holbeach was all very well, especially in summer, but did that mean —— ?

“ Then you can’t ask her ? ”

“ Yes, I am going to see Mrs. Hyde.”

George bucked up and down in his chair.

“ I say, that’s —— It’s awful important, you know, mother. I can’t tell you here.”

George glanced cautiously and suspiciously at his neighbours.

“ No, dear, but Mr. Clapp came down on Sunday.”

“ To see Aunt Eliza ? ”

“ Miss Clapp, dear. She talked the matter over with your father. I will see what Mrs. Hyde says.”

“ She’s a pretty lady, almost as pretty as Rachel.”

“ Favours go with faces, George, do they ? ”

“ Well, you’re just as pretty, mother.”

Mrs. Gregson laughed. Her son should get on in the world, if he did not spread his favours too lavishly.

George, full to capacity, a capacity that was tested still

further by a bottle of ginger-beer, began to envisage Holbeach Hurn & Chantry Farm as a Field of the Cloth of Gold. What if Mrs. Hyde said yes ? Which, of course, was what she would say. Wouldn't it be wonderful ? He would be able to show Rachel the pigs, and the cows and the fat cattle, and the geese and the hens, and the mountain of corn in the granary. They could hunt eggs together, and be weighed on the granary scales before and after Christmas dinner. They could toboggan down the straw-stack if Uncle Joe was not about ; Uncle Joe was a rather terrifying old gentleman, Uncle will much less so. Then, there was the pigeon loft, and the funny old mound in the Fifteen Acre where rabbits lived. He might shoot a rabbit. He could boast about it at school to fellows like Barter. The little hero would show off to the heroine. As for the Chantry commissariat it was just marvellous, turkey and sausages, roast beef, pork pie, Christmas pudding, custards, mince-pies, cheesecakes, Christmas cake with pink and white sugar on it. Aunt Amelia's Christmas cakes were mountains of munificence. Then, there was the dairy cellar, and the kitchen hung with hams. George was dreaming dreams of love and feasting.

His mother paid the bill and tipped the waitress.

" A happy Christmas to you, madam, and to the young gentleman."

" The same to you," said George.

Mrs. Gregson collected her parcels.

" What would you like for Christmas, dear ? "

" Father said he would give me a watch."

" Yes, but from me ? "

" Soldiers," said George.

" What, more soldiers ? "

" Yes, mother. I want a bigger army than Roland Harker."

Mary Gregson took her son to the toy department, and there he chose a squadron of Life Guards, all silver and red on black horses. The box was a large one, but George wanted to take it away.

" It had better be sent, dear."

" To Holbeach ? "

" No, home."

" Then I shan't have it for Christmas."

" Something to look forward to when we go home."

Mrs. Gregson believed in doing things comfortable when she allowed herself a day in town, so she took a hansom, and packed George and her parcels into it, plus the box of soldiers which George would not abandon. It was a longish

drive to Canonbury, and now that George was alone with his mother, for the cabman was invisible and so did not count, he began to tell her the story of the wicked Otto Schultze.

George was a truthful child, but he did possess an ingenuous fancy and a desire to shine in the maternal presence. Herr Schultze might be large and live and sinister, but there was mystery here, a mystery that George beheld with the wonder-making eyes of childhood. What was the secret of that strange, high house ? Was there buried treasure there, or secret coffers full of precious stones ? George had been reading Harrison Ainsworth, "The Tower of London" and "Old St. Pauls", and the rather grisly and fantastic London of the Great Fire and the Plague seemed almost the London that he knew. His mother, listening to his ingenuous tale of strange happenings in the fog and in the dim dusk of London streets, was conscious of a curious feeling of emotional suspense. Here they were, riding together in a prosaic cab behind an animal whose habits were natural and obvious, and yet —— ! Mary Gregson was the mother of her son, and to her, this London, suddenly drenched with the December dusk, and becoming yet more mysterious with its puzzled lights, was not the city of The Civil Service Stores & the Agricultural

Hall, but pure phantasy. This was the London of Jane Shore and Richard the Strangler, and whoring Henry and his formidable daughters, and of headless Charles, and the Plague, and of tumbrils rumbling to those ghastly pits where bodies oozed into quaking jelly. Beauty there might be, but it was the beauty of John Keats spitting blood, and of dark and unhappy houses. Yes, this was no haunted forest, but a wilderness of strange, dim houses, of unknown people and of obscure happenings, a shadow world, macabre, disturbing, soused in secret blood and tears.

George's mother gave a little shiver. Why was she feeling like this? Surely, the simple words of a child were no abracadabra? Was not this decorous Upper Street, full of good Cockney folk going about their business? And yes, this feeling of emotional tension, of imminent tragedy would not be clarified by common-sense. That which was obvious might be mystical, and the real and the unreal vague shapes shadowing each other in these December streets.

III

THE great house towered over them. It seemed to go up and

up into the sky and to merge itself into the dusk. It was a lightless house, dead of eye and silent, and George leaning forward, pointed at it.

“ That’s Rye House, mother.”

Rye House ! The very name was a conspiracy. And suddenly a voice addressed them from nowhere, the voice of the cabman who was not sure of his whereabouts. He had lifted the flap in the cab’s roof.

“ Is this the place, m’am ? ”

Mary Gregson was guilty of a most perceptible jump.

“ Yes, that is Sussex Terrace.”

George had felt the contraction of his mother’s body, and peered at her, wide eyed.

“ It made you jump, mother.”

“ Yes, my dear. I had forgotten —— ”

“ Sorry, m’am,” said the voice, “ can y’tell me which is No. 2 ? ”

George’s treble answered him.

“ No. 2’s just over there. The second door.”

The cabbie had pulled up. He let the flap fall, and gave the reins a tweak.

“ Gee-up, Gladstone,” and Gladstone geed up.

George pushed the door open, and clutching his box of

soldiers, climbed out. His mother was gathering parcels and pressing them, like emotion, to her breasts. Really, it was absurd to feel so jumpy. She stood under a dim street lamp, and spoke to the man above.

“ Could you wait ? I shall be about half an hour.”

The cabman was not helpful. He had been on the streets since eight, and the old ‘oss was tired, and he wanted his money and his tea.

“ Sorry, m’am. Where would you want to be going ? ”

“ Fenchurch Street.”

“ Lord love you, that’s miles from where me and Gladstone doss down. Can’t do it, m’am.”

Mary Gregson paid him.

“ Where could I get another cab ? ”

“ There’s a rank near Highbury Station, or you could take a train to Broad Street, m’am. It’s no sort of walk from Broad Street to Fenchurch.”

He was turning his horse and trotting off as George and his mother reached the door of No. 2. George and the parcels could be deposited there ; moreover she wished for a few words with Mr. Clapp, for Mr. Clapp was solid and real, and somehow reassuring in the face of a mystery that had begun to trouble her. Ought she to have thrust herself

into this other and strange world, and was it no more than the thing that her husband had called a mare's nest ?

Ellen opened the door to them, an Ellen who was solid and obvious. Yes, Mr. Clapp was in, but not the lady, and even while Ellen was closing the door, Mr. Clapp himself appeared from the Rookery rather like a large animal emerging from a cave.

" I have brought George back," said his mother.

" So I see. What, and with more soldiers ? "

" Yes, Life Guards," said George.

But Mr. Clapp was looking at the lady, and Mr. Clapp was quick at reading faces.

" May I have a few words with you, Mr. Clapp ? "

Mr. Clapp opened the dining room door.

" George, hold a parade."

" May I ? "

" Of course. Now, madam."

Almost he had said "My dear," for Beauty in distress made an instant appeal to Mr. Clapp, even though the cause of it might be only chagrin over the unfriendliness of a new bonnet. He drew the door to, pushed a chair nearer to the fire, and with back tactfully turned, stirred up the coals with the poker.

“ May I ask you a question, Mr. Clapp ? ”

“ Any number, madam.”

“ Ought I to go next door ? ”

Mr. Clapp sat on his heels, and with deliberation and using the tongs, transferred two large lumps of coal from the coal-box to the fire.

“ Why not ? ”

“ I was wondering. Is this serious, or just —— ”

“ George’s tale-spinning ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ In my opinion it is completely serious. Because a thing seems fantastic, it may be all the more real.”

“ Might they not resent —— ? I mean, we are strangers.”

Mr. Clapp replaced the poker.

“ That is a point that has always puzzled me, why so-called strangers should be less our friends than the very dull people we meet each day. New country, madam, the magic valley beyond the hills. Most certainly I should go.”

“ What kind of woman is —— ? ”

“ Mrs. Hyde ? ”

“ Yes.”

Mr. Clapp stood and smiled down at the fire.

“ Elizabethan, Florence of the Medicis, Botticelli. Floweriness, what ! Not quite. You, madam, will, I think, understand when you see her.”

“ Does she expect me ? ”

“ I rather think she does.”

“ Well, I will go.”

IV

THE wizardry of worlds may be as unexplainable as the suddenness of our human likes and dislikes, but when Rachel's mother opened the door to George's mother, and the fair woman looked into the eyes of the dark one, that which Mr. Clapp had prophesied came to pass. It has been said that all women secretly resent beauty in other women, and had Josiah Wedgewood been posed with the question, he might have met it with another question — “ If both women are comely, need there be prejudice ? ” Moreover, both these two women were frightened, of each other, of a particular situation, and of the strange and nameless things that seem to drift about in the human psyche, and each seemed do become conscious of the other's fear.

“ I'm George's mother.”

She smiled, and Mary Gregson had a rather lovely smile, in that it was evidential, and not a light that was turned on and off for some social occasion. Ann Hyde did not smile, at least not instantly. Her dark eyes were two windows from which her secret self looked out upon life and the face of this stranger. Her consciousness was quick with questions, ready to resent that which might wound an imperative and jealous pride. Did this other woman come with patronage in her heart, that stooping snobbery that seeks self-flattery in feeling superior ?

“ Mrs. Gregson ? ”

“ Yes. It seems that we know each other through our children.”

It was Mary who played suppliant, Mary whose face seemed to wince before the possible rebuff. Those who are sensitive are so quick to fear and divine that which is vulnerable and sensitive in others. Her eyes said “ Do let me in. I’m not a snob or a spy upon your secrets,” and suddenly the other woman was smiling. She could divine the child in the drawing room and the curtains were drawn, and Mary Gregson took the chair that was offered her with the air of a woman who was tired.

“ May I take my bonnet off ? So much shopping.”

She put up her hands to undo a bow, and Ann Hyde seemed to find that simple gesture consoling.

“ Oh, please do. Let me take it.”

“ Thank you so much. I do hope Rachel is better ? ”

“ Yes, but still in bed.”

“ Will she be well for Christmas ? You see, I came to ask you whether —— ”

There was a pause, and Rachel's mother, standing on the hearthrug and holding Mary's bonnet like a bird in her two hands, seemed to be waiting upon the promptings of some inward voice.

“ Why should you ? ”

Mary Gregson lay back and smiled.

“ Why ? Well, I don't know. Does that sound rude ? George asked me.”

“ You don't know us.”

“ Somehow, I feel I do. I felt I knew you directly I saw you. But you didn't.”

“ But now ? ”

“ Perhaps.”

Mary Gregson saw the other woman turn and lay her bonnet gently like a posy of flowers upon the table. She stood regarding it for some seconds, as though it had some

secret inspiration for her. Another woman's bonnet. But secret inspiration for her. Another woman's bonnet. But how much depended upon the head that wore it ! She came out of her stare, suddenly, and with the suggestion of an impulse that refused to be flouted.

" Mrs. Gregson, how much do you know about us ? "

" George has told me, and someone else."

" Do you believe it ? "

" Of course."

" But how ? I should have said that you — I mean, your eyes —— "

" They are the eyes of a happy person, secure, untroubled. Nothing in life has been evil to you."

" Perhaps not, but need that make one blind. If one is sensitive —— "

" What do you feel ? "

"About ? "

" This house. The fire is burning, the lights are lit, the curtains drawn. All so natural. Just a room in a London suburb. And yet —— "

She seemed to give a little shudder, and to smother it with a sudden contraction of her muscles.

" Fear. It must seem so strange to you. We have lived

with fear. It is so much worse than being poor. Why fear ?
Oh, well, that is our secret. Do you wish me to tell it to
you ? ”

“ No.”

“ You mean, you accept, the mystery shall we call it ? ”

“ Of course. You need tell me nothing.”

“ That means that I shall tell you everything.”

Chapter 18

ONE may be proud both of things and of people, but the most vivid of prides is that which is lit and kept burning by the particular things that a particular person may do, and Mary Gregson, who had this pride, was quick to divine it in Rachel's mother. Women do not always talk as men talk ; there is more interplay, more tossing of the apple to and fro, more emotion, less prose. There is live listening, and passive listening, and Mary Gregson's was both. Ann Hyde, posed on a footstool before the fire, elbows on knees, her chin cupped in her two hands, was strangely still, but with the stillness of some tense and inwardly controlled emotion. The firelight played upon her face and hair. She turned down the lights, and Mary had smiled at her. They were together like a couple of sybils in a secret cave, and the mood of the moment was intimate and consenting.

Ann Hyde did not say it in so many words, but the meaning of it filled the shadowy room like the flicker of the fire.

"I married ambition. Can you understand that ? One has to give so much, and somehow find one's happiness in the giving. And what is happiness ? Giving ? I am the mother of my man's urge. I have given my breasts to it, my care, my

fortitude, my cunning. And why ? Only those who cannot love ask such a question."

Her dark eyes had swept suddenly round to the other woman's face, and discovered there the sheen of a happy serenity. This other woman too had wells of tenderness within her, sources of secret pride.

" You too have given much."

" Oh, I don't know," said Mary, smiling, " I seem to be a happy person."

" There are such differences."

" In happiness ? "

" Well, in its atmosphere, the Spanish school, or the Italian."

" Or the comfortably English. And I suppose I am more Constable than Turner. But do go on."

" My husband is an inventor. The world isn't very sympathetic to such people."

" Until —— ? "

" Yes, perhaps until the world smells money. We have never had much money. Seven years of research. No one in this country was interested."

She gave a little laugh, and spread her hands to the fire. She began to speak of their adventures, of the strange

shifts and improvisations of such a life, it's brittle humour, its humiliations. Yes, if one could not laugh sometimes, the business became too desperate. They had lived in back streets, in a stable even ; for one whole year they had camped in a semi-derelict Sussex farmhouse. There, the snow had come down the chimneys, and rats had scampered, and they had lived on potatoes, greens, oatmeal and bread. Hunger, oh, yes, and cold, and apple pie every day of the week when apples were in season and the dead wood from the rotting orchard for your fuel. Materials and tools cost money. Steel and tools were cold things to handle on a winter morning in a draughty old workshop. She and John had often begun the day by sawing up wood to get the numbness out of their fingers.

Had they had no one to help them ? There had been Uncle James, but Uncle James had been in China during that period, and in confessing to her own pride, she could place her husband's pride at an even higher level. Or was it a lower level ? Proud as Lucifer ! The bitter pride of the baulked genius. Then, there had come that day when John Hyde's anger had broken loose. His country was not interested. Oh, well, damn England, he would go elsewhere, cut himself off, become an exile. Other countries might be

more receptive, and open to new men and new ideas. He would go and see the Germans. It might be a gamble with the remnants of their capital, but England had become a country of despair.

Had Mary Gregson ever heard of Bergman's ? She had, a name that was as famous almost as that of the great Krupp. John Hyde had packed a bag, and travelled third-class, and on bread and cheese to the Rhur. Appearances ? Oh, well, the Germans were less sensitive to snobbery than the English, save in their attitude to the army. Ideas mattered more than the cut of your coat. Astonishing discovery, the Germans had been interested and kind. Perhaps, in that moment of hope John Hyde had not divined the interested nature of their kindness.

They had given him lodgings and a little workshop of his own, and money to live on. Old Berman had behaved quite paternally. She, Ann, had joined her husband in Germany, leaving Rachel with an old aunt in Herefordshire. Those had been happy, exciting days. The new invention was taking shape behind the locked door of John Hyde's workshop. The Germans had continued to be kind. And then, they had become conscious of a something, suspicion, a surveillance that was both sly and smiling.

“ We realised that we were being watched. John had been given a little safe in which to keep his plans and his notes. No one else was supposed to have access to it.”

“ And they had ? ”

“ Oh, yes. I remember John growing suddenly suspicious. They were very careful, but he had noticed something ; I think it was no more than a finger-mark on one of his scale-drawings. “ Hallo, what’s this ? ” Was someone coming to the safe at night, and copying his plans and notes ? We tried a little trick. We spread a drop of gum between two papers, so that they stuck, but only lightly so. Next day, they were not stuck together. Someone had been there.”

Mary had the wide-eyed, entranced look of her son when listening to some tale of adventure.

“ How horrible ! I mean, the feeling of being watched. What did you do ? ”

“ Nothing, to begin with. We did not want to let them know that we knew they were stealing our secret. My husband wanted to go to Herr Bergman and tell him, but I had begun to be afraid. Fear takes away all faith in people. And we were so much in their power. But John is the kind of man who hates all lying and subterfuges. He said he would test old Bergman by going to him and saying

that the work seemed near its end, and that he would like to discuss the future. If this new engine ran its test successfully, what terms would the firm offer to the inventor."

"I see. A kind of judgment of Solomon."

"It was. I remember John describing the interview, how old Bergman had patted him, smiled like a father, and promised nothing. "Aach, Herr Hyde, do not worry. We shall be generous." We seemed to know then that there would be treachery, and so we made our plans. We had very little money, and almost we were prisoners. John locked himself in his workshop one whole day. He smashed things, and melted down the most vital and delicate parts in his furnace. He had given me his plans, and I had sewn them into the lining of his coat. That evening we went to a beer-garden, and when we left it we walked to our lodgings, as though that was the end of our day. We felt that we were being watched. At midnight we crept out and walked out of the town. We walked all that night. Next day we hid in a wood. The next night we walked again. The soles of my shoes were through, and my feet raw when we reached the frontier. I believe they had made plans to stop us there, but what do you think saved us?"

“ What ? ”

“ A dog fight. A Dutch dog and a German dog. I think each dog must have belonged to the frontier officials, and that there was spite in it. They were all watching and shouting and swearing, and while it was happening we slipped through. We were out of Germany, the Dutch stopped us, but their dog had lost the fight, and they were angry. They would not listen to the Germans. We were free.”

“ My dear, what an escape ! ”

“ It must all sound so incredible. I think we arrived in England with about the value of twopence in our pockets, and the third of a Dutch cheese. We were pretty desperate, but we had saved our plans.”

“ But if they had been copying them secretly ? ”

“ Oh, John had thought of that. When we began to suspect them, he deliberately falsified things. We have often laughed about it. I expect Bergman & Co. built an experimental model according to those figures, and found it would not work.”

“ How lovely ! ”

“ Yes, so we thought. And our luck began to turn. Poor old Aunt Caroline died and left us a legacy of two hundred pounds. Also, Uncle James was home. Uncle James is a

rather wonderful person. He is taking up my husband's invention and financing it. We had begun to feel secure until all this happened."

"And you are afraid?"

Ann Hyde sat staring at the fire.

"Yes. It might seem impossible that anything could happen to us here. Have you ever felt evil near you, an evil that is cunning, and without pity?"

"No."

"I hope you never will. We know now with what sort of evil and ruthless thing we have to cheat."

George Gregson's mother asked the obvious question.

"But why don't you appeal to the police?"

"Because we doubt whether they would believe us. Besides, what could they do. They would have no case against these Germans. Ostensibly this man Schultze is just an obscure clerk in a respectable city office, and here to learn the language. The other man would swear that he had come as the accredited representative of Bergman & Co. to try and do business with my husband. We are surrounded by shadows, not proofs."

"Yes, shadows. I understand. Well, then, you will let us take Rachel."

“ Will you ? ”

“ Of course.”

Ann Hyde turned, and two hands met and clasped each other.

“ Thank you, my dear. I think I may call you that ! You can guess what a relief it will be to feel that the child is not involved in this horror. Yes, horror is the word, though it sounds so melodramatic.”

“ Do you really believe that they would go to any lengths ? ”

“ I’m afraid I do. The Germans are a strange people. The savage is there under the Hauptman’s tunic and the merchant’s frock coat. May I bring my husband down and tell him ? ”

Their hands fell apart.

“ Oh, please, yes. And may I see Rachel presently ? ”

“ Of course. She doesn’t know.”

“ What George knows ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ Well, she must not know. Children ought to be happy.”

“ Like George.”

“ Yes, like George.”

II

THE man with the black eyebrows was in one of his awkward moods, Bible & Broadsword & Covenant. He was not a consenting person. He had streaks of cruelty in him, those hard veins in the human make-up which refuse to dissolve in sentiment. He disliked most women, and old people, anything that was finished and becoming parasitic, and on this particular day he had fumbled a job, and was cursing his own fingers.

“ John.”

“ Hallo ! ”

“ Mrs. Gregson is downstairs.”

Damn Mrs. Gregson ! Was she one of those smug, interfering trouts with fish-mouths who come poking and nibbling at your private affairs ?

“ What’s the woman want ? ”

“ To see you. And she isn’t a woman.”

“ Hermaphrodite ! ”

Ann Hyde had tried the door and found it locked. She knew these moods and bore with them, for if a man must sometimes behave like a tempestuous and naughty child, you could not smack the grown man save with words, and

those words had to eschew anger.

“ John.”

“ Yes ? ”

“ Don’t leave it all to me. I’m frightened.”

“ Frightened ? What’s the damned woman been —— ? ”

“ She’s not a damned woman ; she’s a dear. Do help me, John.”

How well she knew her husband, and the use of the blackbird note ! She heard him come to the door, and the turning of the key. He was in his shirt sleeves, and somehow, man, the maker of things, man, the primitive when his bowels are made to yearn. She bent to him and let her head rest against his shoulder, and he held her.

“ Sorry, Nan. I seem to give you nothing but crises. What’s the woman like ? ”

“ Come and see.”

“ Does she mean to take the child ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ Why the devil should she ? ”

“ John, don’t you believe in human kindness ? ”

He winced, laughed it off, and stroked her head.

“ Not much. But in you. You’ve never failed me, my sweet. I’m God’s own hog in rooting up problems. All right, coat’s

on and manners dressed. It's really very decent of her. She gets nothing out of it."

" She gets what matters, John."

" Oh, yes, the emotional thrill ! "

If she sometimes had to laugh at life's disharmonies, Ann Hyde could say that persuading John to be a social creature was like leading a rather savage dog into a drawing room and hoping that he would neither growl nor bite, yet there was to be an unexpectedness about this introduction that lay in the cunning of coincidence. She had turned up the lights, and rather like a shy young schoolmistress shepherding a contumacious child into the vestry to be catechised on the commandments, said, " Here is my husband."

John Hyde just stood and stared, and was dumb. In fact he was all eyes, a man soused in some astonishing reappearance of the past, and trying to recreate it.

" My God, Mary ! "

George's mother was less quick to recapture a memory.

" Have we —— ? "

" It is Mary, isn't it ? "

" Yes."

" Mary, what was it ? Good Lord, yes. Don't you remember

Torquay, and the lout who threw sand in your face ? Funny introduction, what ! She has forgotten my kisses, and I have forgotten her name ! ”

He laughed, and turning suddenly to his wife, put his arm around her shoulders.

“ I was about thirteen, the lady eleven or so. Quite an infantile romance. But what was your name ? ”

“ Murchison.”

“ Of course. Mary Murchison. The alliteration ought to have prompted me. You’re just like the kid.”

“ Thank you. That must be a compliment ! ”

“ I wonder ! And Jackie Hyde is different ? ”

“ Very.”

“ Yes, I believe I was almost the choir-boy beauty ! A little more savage and hairy now. And you are George’s mother ! ”

III

IT seemed so easy for them now to discuss and frame their plan. The Gregsons were travelling to Lincolnshire on the following Wednesday, and George was to meet them at King’s Cross. If Mr. Clapp could be persuaded to take both

children in a closed cab to the station, and if Rachel were smuggled out of No. 1 and into No. 2 while it was still dark, no Peeping Tom might be any the wiser. Abduction could be a very serious offence in the eyes of the Law, but these German gentlemen might put up a very plausible case.

“ It would read like this,” said Rachel’s father. “ They would accuse me of being the thief. They would all perjure themselves in chorus in the best Bismarckian manner. They would accuse me of gross ingratitude, in that they had fathered my researches, given me an income and laboratory, and that I, had tried to cheat them. They would protest that the purloining of the child had been an ironic gesture, a very broad hint to me that I could not fool them. In fact they might pretend that the abduction was a quite innocent move to force me into court, and to stage an exposure. Harm the child ! Mein Gott, no ! Were they not all fathers and good Christians ! ”

He filled a pipe, stuffing the tobacco into it with fierce, ironic fingers.

“ Besides, money talks. They would fee the best legal buccaneer in London to try and prove me a scoundrel. Some blows are best eluded. We’ll elude this one.”

So, it was agreed between them, and Georgie’s mother put

on her bonnet and was kissed by Mary.

“ You will come up and see Rachel ? ”

“ May I ? I mustn't stay long. I have to say goodbye to George.”

Rachel's father put his pipe aside.

“ And may I too kiss or be kissed ? Thank you, Mary. And to think that I ever threw sand in your sweet face ! ”

IV

GEORGE GREGSON was feeling hugely important, and Mr. Clapp only a little less so. They were in consultation across The Rookery table, a pair of English gentlemen prepared to fool all buccaneers and pirates.

“ Now, George,” said Josiah Wedgewood, “ I am going to make a prophecy, and if I am wrong you can mock me as the rude children mocked Elisha.”

“ But would there be bears, Mr. Clapp ? ”

Mr. Clapp chuckled and heaved, and his chair creaked.

“ I am a little less jealous than Jehovah, George. Now, listen, I prophesy that you will meet Herr Schultze tomorrow or the next day. Herr Schultze will arrange the occasion.”

“ When I am going to school ? ”

“ Precisely. Herr Schultze will be very big-brotherish. He may offer you sweets ; he may offer you soldiers, but if I am anything of an Elisha, he will ask you a particular question.”

“ Yes, Mr. Clapp. What will —— ? ”

“ He will ask you how the nice little girl is who lives next door. He may even ask for an introduction.”

“ And what do I say, Mr. Clapp ? ”

“ Any ideas, George Gregson ? ”

George tilted his chair.

“ I might say that Rachel’s in bed with measles.”

“ Splendid. German measles ? ”

“ No, English Measles, Mr. Clapp. They’re much more serious, aren’t they ? ”

Mr. Clapp extended a very large hand, palm upwards, across the table.

“ Shake hands, George Gregson. You can call me the baldest of loons, and no bears shall devour you.”

Again, there was fog, and the strange stillness thereof, a wet fog, silver grey and not yellow like it would be in the city. It seeped in at windows and at doors, and touched the skin like some chilly, ghostly tissue. Mr. Clapp loathed

fog, and he had cut himself while shaving, and this minor accident made him late for breakfast.

Georgie Gregson left the house a few minutes before the master, but he knew how the game was to be played, and that he was to wait for Mr. Clapp and report to him by "The Bunch of Grapes" in the Goswell Road. George had no dislike of fogs, since a good "Pea Souper" might mean that the school closed at three, and that he could escape from algebra into the mysterious streets, but George did realise that this blanket of mist might make a meeting with Herr Schultze none too easy. George felt excited, and perhaps just a little frightened, yet he knew that Mr. Clapp would be looming somewhere behind him like a big ship ready to rescue an exploring pinnace. What a strange, muffled silence! George stood a moment in the Painswick Road, and listened, just because there was nothing to listen to. Canonbury seemed dead and covered with a silver shroud. A smut descended upon George's nose, and he squinted at it, and smeared it downwards with a gloved finger. No footsteps, no rumbling of wheels, no clop-clop of horses hoofs. But there was one queer sound, and it puzzled the child. What was it? A drop of moisture alighting on his cap revealed to George its nature. The

bare elms and the acacias and the hollies were drenched with fog-dew, and sending a drip-drip down upon the pavements.

George came to the Canonbury Road and the bridge across the New River. Crossing the road would have been an adventure on this blind morning had there been much traffic moving, but George crossed it at his leisure, and hung on to the railings on the opposite side of the bridge. The posts closing the entry to Asteys Row were visible to him, as was the bole of the Plane tree which grew here, but the crown of the tree was lost in the fog. Moisture was dripping from it, and making minute splashes and circles in the water below. George's ears were pricked. He was listening for footsteps, expecting those particular footsteps to come from the other side of the road, the quick and marching steps of a German soldier. Footsteps he did hear, but they hobbled past him with a sudden eddy of sneezes. A van rumbled by, smothering the silence, and when the granite sets had ceased to resound to the iron of tyres and hoofs, George heard someone walking towards him up Asteys Row. That could not be Herr Schultze, for the unseen person was coming from the opposite direction. But might not Herr Schultze be patrolling that pathway ?

George stared into the fog. He saw a dim shape grow in it and gather solidity. It was Herr Schultze, and George separated himself swiftly from the railings.

“Hallo, Georgie.”

“Good morning, Herr Schultze.”

“You, to school go. I, a book had forgotten, but it matters not. I with you will walk.”

George smiled up at the German.

“Holidays next week. Do you take a holiday, Herr Schultze?”

“I? No, Georgie. I work, but not on Christmas Day, or the funny day you Boxing call.”

George laughed.

“Is Christmas good in Germany?”

“Very good. And you home go?”

“Yes.”

“And where is that?”

George was a quick child, and the impulse to lie was instant.

“I go to — to Hastings.”

“Ach, Hastings.”

Herr Schultze had a big brotherly hand on George's shoulder.

“ You, the Christmas pudding eat. And who do you under the mistletoe kiss ? ”

“ Mother and Ethel.”

Herr Schultze gave George a playful push.

“ And the little girl who lives next door ? ”

“ I’d like to,” said George, “ but she’s ill.”

“ Ill ? ”

“ Yes, with measles. English, not German.”

Herr Schultze became silent. He withdrew his hand from George’s shoulder, and the boy’s feelings about it was that this piece of news was disturbing to the young German. Was Herr Schultze pleased, or not pleased ? Did he himself know a child supposedly sick was more at his mercy than a child who was well ? Herr Schultze was debating that very point. A child in bed was safely in bed, but it would mean that she could not be inveigled into some quiet street and be smuggled into a cab.

George glanced up innocently into Herr Schultze’s face. At the moment it was not very pleasant face, but grim of lip, and harsh of eye.

“ Have you had measles, Herr Schultze ? ”

Herr Schultze came out of his stare.

“ I ? Yes.”

“ German measles ? ”

Herr Schultze produced a laugh.

“ We do not German measles them call.”

“ Are they nastier in Germany ? I’ve had measles. The English ones. They were horrid.”

Children should be humoured, and once again Herr Schultze patted George’s shoulder.

“ Poor Georgie. It is sad too for the pretty leetle girl, is it not ? ”

“ Very.”

“ Has she ill long been ? ”

“ I think about a week,” said George.

They were in the Essex Road now, and because of the fog the shop windows were lit by gas. Herr Schultze did not seem to like the fog. He blew out his lips, and stuffed his hands into his overcoat pockets.

“ Aach, your English winter foul is, Georgie. Brrr, and it smells. You English must eat fog.”

George laughed, and asked Herr Schultze a question.

“ Have I a must on my nose ? ”

“ Yah, a black mark.”

“ I must wash it off before I go in to school prayers.”

Herr Schultze’s air of big brotherliness seemed to fade

away into the fog, and his face became the face of a Prussian. Herr Schultze had absorbed the new German philosophy. Nothing most impede the progress of the super-folk. It behoved you to be thorough and ruthless even in the crunching of a snail, nor was any obstacle too trivial for the business of the boot. Smile, smile, smile ; lie, lie, lie, and then stab your rival when he has the drinking-horn at his lips. Herr Otto Schultze may not have been aware of it, but he was striding like an officer of the Guards down Unter den Linden, head up, jaw stuck out, eyes glazed with arrogance. The child, glancing up at him, was suddenly conscious of an inward shrinking. Herr Schultze's face had become ugly. Mr. Clapp would have described it as evil and brutal, but its handsome savagery scared the child. He wanted to get away from the German.

" I am going now, Herr Schultze."

" Going. Why ? "

Almost it was a sergeant-major's snarl, and George bolted down a side street. This was an alternative short-cut, and George took his heels and ran. Herr Schultze stood rigid for a moment, staring into the fog, then he spat and walked on.

" Silly little swine."

George, still a little breathless, waited for Mr. Clapp outside the " Bunch of Grapes ", and he was glad when he saw that large and rolling figure looming down on him.

" Well, George, any luck ? "

" Yes, Mr. Clapp. Herr Schultze asked about Rachel."

" And you told him ? "

" She's ill with measles. He didn't seem pleased."

" Perhaps not."

" And his face went ugly."

" Ugly, my dear ? "

" Yes, cruel. I think Herr Schultze could be very cruel, Mr. Clapp."

" I rather think so, too," said the big man, and Mr. Clapp added to himself " It would be pleasant to give that hard young brute a good one on the jaw."

Chapter 19

MR. MILLER was still absent from the City, and Herr Schultze spent an hour in concocting a somewhat lengthy telegram in code to a relative in Germany. He wrote it on a sheet of Mr. Miller's office note-paper, and without asking Mr. Goldstein's leave, took his hat and coat, and went out into the fog, which was good English and yellow in Fenchurch Street. What a city! Even the faces of its citizens looked yellow, and the street lamps bilious blobs of light. The clerk behind the grill glanced sourly at Herr Schultze's sheet of paper. No, he would not accept it in its present forms, nor was it sufficiently intelligible for transmission. Herr Schultze had better reproduce it in block letters on a proper form, especially so since the language was not English.

Herr Schultze smiled a canine smile, and taking the paper to a desk, reconstructed the message in block capitals. It had the appearance of asking a few simple business questions. It presumed that a certain letter had been received in Germany, and it asked whether the price quoted for the goods was justified, and should he agree to buy at that figure? The clerk accepted the reconstructed

message, totted up the words, and told Herr Schultze what it would cost him.

Herr Schultze tendered a sovereign, received a little silver in return, and was about to leave, when the clerk called him back.

“ No name and address given.”

“ Not necessary.”

“ Yes, it is. Our regulations.”

The form was pushed back to Herr Schultze, and Herr Schultze cogitated for a moment. Then he pencilled on the form his name and address, and it was not the address of Messrs. Miller & Co.

The reply reached him next day at Canonbury. He had absented himself from business. The message was in code, and it was brief and emphatic.

“ Carry business through. Consult Rosenheim. Use pressure if necessary. Rosenheim has been advised.”

It was a brilliant day, for frost and sun had replaced the fog, and Otto Schultze found a cab waiting by Highbury Station and told the cabbie to drive him to Waterloo. This was to be no clerky affair, for Otto was not visiting Mr. Rosenheim at his Surbiton mansion as an obscure member of Mr. Miller's staff, but as a young and arrogant hero

sponsored by that dominant race which knew how to make use of a Hebrew. Herr Schultze travelled first class to Surbiton, and there he chartered another cab and was driven to Mr. Rosenheim's. Mr. Rosenheim's mansion stood back from the river, a large, Italianate, bastard of a building in grey stucco. Its windows stared across the tranquil Thames to the green spaciousness and the towering elms of Hampton, and on this frosty morning it seemed to wear on its vulgar and embattled face a grey and glittering grin. Let King Harry and the Cardinal and William of Orange float placidly into the past. The new world was very much Rosenheim, even though its ascent into heaven was sometimes a little smeary and surreptitious.

Mr. Rosenheim had become Mr. Stewart Rosenheim, and was progressing towards the complete tartan. Later the world was to know him as Mr. Stewart, and he might even become Lord Sligo. In intelligence and appetites he was international, but he cultivated an air of Englishry. In fact to the ordinary man he did not look the Jew, being grey-blond and high coloured, with a large nose that was straighter than his heritage. At sixty three he looked rather like a grizzled old wolf, baldish on the crown,

yellow fanged, with a pair of harsh blue eyes, like frosted glass, especially when he smiled. He chose to dress like an English country gentleman and to wear a monocle, and a carnation in his buttonhole. He kept race-horses and owned a yacht, and even had been addressed by a Royal Personage as "Hallo, Rosenheim, you old bastard." Such frank familiarity had pleased the Jew greatly, for he was a supreme snob.

Mr. Rosenheim was expecting Herr Otto to lunch. Hock was indicated, and any luxury dish that was out of season, for this particular person was to be propitiated.

Mr. Rosenheim was not wholly pleased with the problem that might be set him, and the direct approach to it that a certain letter had indicated. Mr. Rosenheim preferred more indirect and circuitous methods, for he was more courageous in manoeuvre than in battle. Strategy was the thing, an ingenuity that gave you results without too much blood and battle.

When Mr. Stewart Rosenheim's butler showed Herr Schultze into his master's library, Mr. Rosenheim's welcome was both hearty and intimate. His frosted-glass grin and his yellow teeth shared in a genial scintillation.

“ Well, well, my dear fellow, delighted, I’m sure.”

A pudgy pink hand offered itself, but Herr Otto Schultze stood very straight, with his heels together, and gave Mr. Rosenheim the slightest and most brittle of bows. This room by the Thames might have been Germany, a country where a financial genius could be tolerated, yet still smell of the Ghetto.

“ His Excellency has notified you of the purpose my visit ? ”

Mr. Rosenheim’s glittering smirk persisted. He had a skin like leather, and the backside of his pride was as resilient as rubber.

“ He has, Herr Otto.”

“ Good. That will save time. Shall we talk ? ”

Mr. Rosenheim knew that his visitor proposed to do the talking, and that, in the nature of things, his own attitude would have to be defensive. Had he not been employed on occasions by the great Chancellor, and did he not know how to play dove to the eagle ? Finesse would be necessary, for the situation was delicate. Mr. Rosenheim was profoundly interested in certain German technical developments, and perhaps, a little inconveniently so. There might have to be limits to his cooperative

friendliness. He would tolerate certain kicks upon the rump, but not that one and devastating kick that might land him in complete collusion.

“ My dear fellow, sherry, a cigar ? I suggest that we talk after lunch. I trust that his Excellency is well ? ”

Herr Schultze remained stiff and distant.

“ My uncle is in excellent health. I would prefer to get the business over. Lunch may help us to digest it.”

Mr. Rosenheim picked up the decanter.

“ As you please, dear baron. I gather that —— The matter is confidential, supremely so. Can anyone listen ? ”

Mr. Rosenheim gave Herr Schultze a peering, oblique look.

“ Listen ? My dear baron, of course not. Perhaps you noticed that a corridor leads to this room, and that the corridor has an outer door.”

“ Lock it,” said Herr Schultze, curtly.

Mr. Rosenheim's hand was completely steady as he filled the glasses.

“ With pleasure.” And with a servile and ironic smirk, and rubbing his fat hands together, he was, for the moment, the Ghetto creature, humouring the soldier and the master. He went and locked the outer door, and returning, laid the

key somewhat suggestively on the table beside the decanter. There lay the key of the citadel.

Standing with his back to the fire and possessing it, Herr Schultze sipped his sherry.

“ You know all about this Hyde affair ? ”

“ Yes, my dear baron.”

“ How he robbed us ? ”

Mr. Rosenheim helped himself deliberately to sherry. It might be necessary to accept a gentleman's statement as the truth, but with secret and private reservations.

“ Can you prove that, my dear baron ? ”

“ Certainly.”

“ Then why not take the case to court ? ”

“ In England ? ”

“ Yes.”

Herr Schultze placed his sherry glass on the mantelpiece, and crossing to the table, helped himself to a cigar.

“ Do you believe, my dear sir, that an English court would give a judgment in a German's favour ? ”

“ It might.”

“ Aach, don't be silly ! We should not do that in Germany. We prefer to make our own law. Then we know it is ours.

The law is a scoundrel."

Mr. Rosenheim also chose a cigar.

"Then you mean to —— ?"

"This man Hyde will not listen to reason. He will not negotiate. What does one do when a foreign country proves recalcitrant ? One may stage a situation that will make negotiation imperative. That is what we are going to do with this greasy engineer."

Mr. Rosenheim nibbled at his cigar.

"What do you expect of me, baron ?"

"Your yacht."

"My yacht ! But it is laid up."

"Where ?"

"At a place called Burnham on Crouch."

Herr Schultze turned, picked up the glass, and sipped his sherry.

"There is no need for you to know anything. You lend us the yacht. Is she in the water ?"

"Yes."

"Then all she needs is a crew on board. I can provide that crew."

Mr. Rosenheim was not at all happy about the proposal. His yacht was a boat of fair tonnage, fitted with an

auxiliary screw, and though he had described her as being laid up for the winter, the statement lacked completeness. He, Mr. Rosenheim, had been contemplating a winter cruise, Spain, Algiers, and perhaps the Adriatic, and the boat could easily be put into service. He nibbled at his cigar, and groped for valid excuses.

“ My dear baron, I am eager to oblige you, but, my captain tells me the engine —— ”

Herr Schultze's pale blue eyes were fixed on him in a stark stare.

“ Don't lie, Rosenheim.”

“ My dear baron ! ”

“ Is the boat to be at our service, or is it not ?

Otherwise —— ”

Herr Schultze saw a kind of greasiness spreading over the Jew's face. He was perspiring.

“ My dear baron, you must know that I am very willing to assist. But believe me, this business —— ”

“ Frightens you ? ”

“ No, no, not quite that. But you must understand that I am in a delicate position.”

“ A foot in each country, hein ! Well, make up your mind which foot is the more important.”

“ But supposing, my dear baron —— ”

Herr Schultze pointed his cigar at the Jew.

“ You know nothing. You, as an old friend of my uncle’s, lend us the yacht. What is dangerous in that ? You Jews want to insure against everything, and always to be sure of the compensation. We shall insure you by our silence. If needs be we can swear that you knew nothing. Now, decide.”

“ You are very harsh with me, my dear baron.”

“ Himmel, do you want to lose your concessions ? Don’t be a fool, Rosenheim. You will do us a service, and you will profit by it. This invention is going to be big business. You can come in or stay out. Make up your mind.”

Mr. Rosenheim shifted uneasily in his chair.

“ If I meet you, baron, have I your word as an officer and a man of honour —— ? ”

“ Of course, Rosenheim. You know nothing. We prefer you to know nothing. Decide.”

“ I suppose I must lend you the yacht, my dear baron. When will you —— ? ”

“ In ten days time, perhaps. Meanwhile have her put in order. We can handle her as far as Bremen. Then, she will be returned to you.”

II

THE great day had come. George, pulling up the blind, saw a moon shining in a frosty sky, and elm trees that were both black and glittery. Christmas ! His small portmanteau lay open upon the floor, ready to receive its final packing, and on the top layer reposed his new box of soldiers. Mrs. Clapp had insisted upon packing for him, since the act of packing provided Mrs. Clapp with an opportunity for exercising authority and interference, and it had enabled her to read George a little lecture upon adolescence and its responsibilities. Really, George was growing too old to play with toy soldiers.

As an adult, George might have said " Damn the woman ! ", but he was not damning anything on this exciting day. Holidays, Christmas, a cab-drive, Kings Cross Station, the train, his mother and father, Rachel. Rachel was to share in all these happy experiences. Holbeach station, Uncle Will waiting with the governess-cart, and John Tory there with a tumbril for the luggage. The lane to Chantry Farm, Aunt Amelia standing at the white gate to wave to them. The paddock, that lovely, rambling old house, the trees in Uncle Will's garden, Uncle Joe stationed by the gate in the

wall with a spud under his arm, and looking like a large black crow.

George washed. There would have been no need for Mrs. Clapp to prompt him to cleanliness, for George was the predestined beau, and neck and ears and teeth received careful attention. He put on his Sunday clothes, Eton jacket and striped trousers. Rather ridiculous to travel to Holbeach in a top-hat, but such was the convention. Top-hats were not needed at Chantry Farm. The sky was bright with a frosty sunrise ; it shone upon the upper windows, but the gardens were still pits of gloom.

George went to the window, and looking down, happened to see a large figure in an ulster standing on the garden roller by the wall separating the gardens of No.1 & 2 Sussex Terrace. A pair of hands appeared and passed a dark object to Mr. Clapp, Rachel's trunk, to be smuggled into the cab with George's portmanteau. George was on his toes, his nose against the glass. How exciting all this was, playing hide and seek with Herr Otto Schultze ! And was Rachel to be smuggled over the wall, and what would Mrs. Clapp have to say about it ? George remained at the upper window. He saw Mr. Clapp disappear with the trunk, and reappear and re-ascend the roller. A little figure rose into view, with

two hands supporting it under the armpits. Mr. Clapp's hands received it. Rachel's legs trailed over the wall. She was turned about so that she could kiss somebody on the other side. Then, Mr. Clapp carried her off.

Mrs. Clapp had said, " Really, Wedgewood, it is quite unnecessary to have the child into breakfast."

Mr. Clapp had replied, " The unnecessary things, my dear, are the spice of life. One has to have buttons on one's trousers, but buttons may be —— "

" Don't be so nonsensical, Wedgewood."

" My dear Charlotte, that is my business. Your business is to sew on the buttons ! "

III

GEORGE hurried downstairs to find Rachel sitting alone on the rather austere dining room sofa. Mrs. Clapp was not yet down, and Mr. Clapp had gone upstairs on business of his own. The table was laid for breakfast, and from below stairs came the fragrance of eggs and bacon. George, suddenly shy, stood in the doorway. How big Rachel's eyes looked ! And why was she so pale ?

" So glad you're coming," said George.

Rachel seemed to wince, and her face went all puckered. She sat there mutely, gazing at him, and suddenly George understood. She was feeling strange and frightened.

“Everybody’s glad you’re coming.”

He slipped round the table and sat down beside her. His hand made a movement ; so did hers.

“Hold my hand.”

“May I ? ” said George.

“Yes, I’m so —— ”

George, shocked and adoring, saw two little blobs of moisture on her cheeks. Rachel was blubbing. Yes, he knew all about that sort of feeling, when your tummy seemed to drop, and you wanted to howl. Oh, that desolate feeling, going among strangers for the first time ! George squeezed her hand.

“Chantry Farm’s a lovely place. We’ll do all sort of things. And I’ve got a present for you.”

“Have you ? ” and she smothered a sob.

“There’ll be lots of presents. And turkey, and plum pudding and mince pies. Aunt Amelia’s cheesecakes are awful good.”

Rachel was not feeling like cheesecakes, but George’s nearness, and his solid little hand were consoling.

“ I shan’t be a nuisance, shall I ? I — I, want to be wanted.”

“ Nuisance ? ” said George, and his near arm slipped round her waist, “ how could you be a nuisance ? Everybody loves you like —— ”

He floundered and went red.

“ Like what ? ”

“ Like I do.”

Mr. Clapp, arriving in his slippers, surprised those two young things in the act of kissing. Well, God bless ‘em, and God be thanked he wasn’t Charlotte !

Breakfast was a mute meal, Mrs. Clapp presiding, and that conventional phrase so well expressed her attitude to the young. She grudged things, withheld from life everything but censure and counsel, and even a second cup of tea was considered to be a favour ! Thank the Lord, Aunt Amelia was not like that ; she pressed cakes and jam upon you. The cab was not due at the door until ten o’clock, and George’s packing was to be completed. Mrs. Clapp insisted upon him accompanying her upstairs to stand about and receive admonition while she finished the business. “ Just because,” thought George, “ I want to be with Rachel.”

Mr. Clapp lit a very large pipe, and sitting down

comfortably in front of the fire, made Rachel pose herself on a footstool beside him. He had an easy way with children. He could talk to them as a child to children, and a grown-up to grown-ups.

“ Christmas comes but once a year. Perhaps it’s as well ! Would you ever get tired of custard and mince-pies, Rachel ? ”

“ No-o, ” said she.

“ I didn’t. I don’t now. But one’s not supposed to say so at my age.”

“ Why not ? ”

“ Why not ? Gosh, my dear, I wish I knew ! ”

IV

AT ten o’clock the man with the black eyebrows chose to take a walk. It was a premeditated walk, and covered no more than a hundred yards of the Painswick Road, with the cul-de-sac of Sussex Terrace as its centre piece. He saw the four-wheeler turn in and draw up outside the doors of No. 2. Were any interested persons lurking in the

neighbourhood ? That was John Hyde's preoccupation, to satisfy himself that nothing sinister was on the prowl, and that Rachel's passing from front door to cab was not observed. Hyde saw no one who could inspire suspicion. George's portmanteau and Rachel's trunk were carried out and stowed away. George followed, and then came Mr. Clapp carrying what looked like a very large bundle. The bundle, covered by a rug, was tucked away between George, and the master. Mr. Clapp pulled up both windows. Someone waved at a window. The man with the black eyebrows, taking no notices of the cab as it passed him, stood to watch it roll away down the Painswick Road, before strolling back to the door of his own house.

Chapter 20

MR. CLAPP stood on the platform and waved goodbye to the two children. George had shed his top-hat, and his fair head crowded close to the girl's dark curls. "Lovely eyes," thought Josiah Wedgewood, "just like your mother's."

Mrs. Gregson was smiling and waving to him, and in the opposite corner Dr. Corrie Gregson, wearing a sporting ulster and a two peaked cloth cap, sat with the *Times* spread upon his knees, very much the tolerant and superior sceptic. Mr. Clapp was not quite sure whether he liked Dr. Corrie Gregson. A fellow who was so obviously good looking was apt to be complacent and conventional, and Mr. Clapp's secret soul loathed the conventions. That creative and romantic forcefulness in man which perpetrates poetry and storms citadels is prone to manifest itself in plain and even grotesque bodies, and Mr. Clapp was of the opinion that Antinous must have been a vain and turgid fool.

"Happy Christmas ! Plenty of pudding."

The children waved to him as the wheels revolved, and their heads remained at the open window until the paternal autocrat, who was feeling the draught, issued an

order, and the two heads disappeared. Dr. Gregson pulled up the window, and smiled at his wife.

“Plenty of pudding there too, I think. Now then, my lad, give the lady the warm corner.”

“Of course I will,” said George.

Mr. Clapp walked back to the barrier, and remained there for half a minute, unostentatiously observing the little crowd that filtered through after seeing off their friends and relations. He noticed nothing that suggested Teutonic interference, nor, when he strolled to the bookstall and loitered there, did anything continental drift across the stage. “Fooled ‘em, I think,” thought Mr. Clapp, and passing out to where his cab was waiting for him, he found friend Tom enjoying a few pulls at a pipe. Mr. Thomas Trite kept his cab in a Canonbury mews, and was chartered regularly by the dwellers in Sussex Terrace.

“Don’t put it out, Tom.”

“That’s all right, sir.”

Tom’s mare turned a head and gazed reproachfully at Mr. Clapp, or that was how Josiah Wedgewood felt about it.

“Don’t look at me like that, Jenny. I may weigh fifteen stone, but —— ”

“She ain’t that sort, sir. Home, now ? ”

“ Yes.”

Mr. Clapp put a foot on the step, and the cab heeled over with complaining springs.

“ Tom, I’m getting too fat ! ”

Mr. Trite knocked his pipe out on the heel of a boot.

“ Lord love you, sir, give me a bit of fat. Much more comfortable.”

He spread the rug over Mr. Clapp’s knees, closed the door, whipped the loin cloth off Jenny, climbed up on his box, and spat. Jenny needed no other stimulus. She would prick her ears, and wait for the spurt of that salivary signal, and hearing it, set the wheels rolling. Mr. Trite and his mare were in perfect accord.

Not so Mr. Clapp and his secret self. That a man should be moved to sudden melancholy by the consciousness of his increasing bulk may be symptomatic of other discontents. Fat and forty, yes and more than forty, and going bald on the top, which was not at all romantic, and Mr. Clapp was incorrigibly romantic. No doubt poor Charlotte had helped to exaggerate those colourful urges which are not publicly permitted to a Master of Arts, and an educator of the young, and Mr. Clapp was sensitive to public opinion. He might make jokes about it, but he conformed. His income

was married to conformity, even as his person was mated to Charlotte. Was it possible for a man to envy a small boy ? It was. This large creature would feel forlorn and desperate and cheated of his panache.

Why had nature perpetrated a joke in giving him this absurd and elephantine body, and the heart of a Bayard or a Coeur de Lion. Was it indecent and caddish to fall in love with another man's wife ? Well, did it matter, when you were fat and bald, and so damnably respectable that your own wife treated you like a tame ape ? But, damn it, he wasn't so old and respectable as all that ! He could still play a hard game of " Fives ", and walk his thirty miles, and hoist some cheeky junior up by the collar and the seat of his pants. Why hadn't he been born in an age when bulk and strength mattered, and fifteen stone in armour could send other fellows crashing. Yes, Crecy would have suited Mr. Clapp's secret soul. He would have shone in the pages of Froissart.

Upper Street, Collins' Music Hall, and that other hall dedicated to Agriculture and military display ! How decorous and full ! But was it your dull self that discovered only dullness in things ? Break the crust of convention, and the chasm of the unknown and the fantastic

lay at your feet. Might not adventure be very near to him, and he be cast for the part of Ye Gentle Knight ? Besides, the sacred flame was the reality, that mysterious and splendid madness that spilled over into poetry and music, colour and passion, and a magnanimity that transcended more greed. Mr. Clapp was gazing at Tom Trite's back and muffler and old top-hat, but he saw more than these. Almost, he was the large child, Georgie magnified, dreaming romantic dreams.

So, they came to the Painswick Road and Sussex Terrace, and Josiah Wedgewood, waking to the adventurous reality, looked right and left to discover whether anything German was loitering within view.

" Oh, Tom."

" Yessir."

Tom was down and opening the cab door, and Mr. Clapp was dipping into a pocket. Largesse, the spacious gesture. He gave Mr. Trite an additional half crown.

" Thank'ee, sir."

" Oh, Tom, a word to the wise. There is some funny business going on round here."

" You don't say so, sir ? "

" If anybody should want to know how much you drove to

King's Cross, tell 'em just me and the boy."

" Nosey Parkers, sir ? "

" Seriously, so, Tom. Nasty foreigners. Have nothing to do with a German band."

" Furriners ! You leave it to me, sir. I'll tell 'em the tale if they come nosing round me."

" Probably they won't, Tom, but just a word to the wise."

" That's me, sir."

The doors of No. 1 & No. 2 Sussex Terrace confronted Mr. Clapp, Convention & Cassandra. But why Cassandra ?

Did Rachel's mother foresee tragedy, some fatal and inevitable finale ? Mr. Clapp walked to the end of the terrace and back again. Tom Trite and his cab were turning into the Painswick Road, and a butcher's boy, carrying a basket, came whistling round the corner. Oh, cheerful and forthright youth !

Mr. Clapp mounted the two steps of No. 1, rang the bell, and turning, stood with his back to the door.

He heard it open, and facing about with an assumption of stout leisureliness, found himself looking into the eyes of a woman who had been weeping. Mr. Clapp raised his hat, and became flustered. Some things moved a man more than was correct and comfortable.

“ Hope I don’t intrude ? I thought you would just like to know —— ”

What expressive eyes she had !

“ How kind of you.”

“ Oh, not at all. Everything went off quite happily.”

She gave him a poignant look.

“ Oh, thank you. You have been so very kind.”

“ Oh, not at all. If I can be of any use at any time, tell your husband to —— ”

“ I will.”

A sudden flustering dumbness descended upon Josiah Wedgewood. He raised his hat again, retreated, missed a step, and clutched the railings. Damned ass !

“ Excuse me. Forgot the step.”

She gave him a little wincing smile.

“ I’m sorry. You haven’t —— ? ”

“ Oh no. Good morning. Just clumsiness. I think she’ll be happy with the Gregsons.”

“ That comforts me.”

“ So glad,” and Mr. Clapp, feeling hot and self-conscious, made for his own door.

How was it that he could not behave with dignity and splendour in the faces of a romantic occasion ? Damned

ass, blundering about like Behemoth in Eden, bumping against trees, and bringing the magic fruit to earth in a discordant shower ! Why, Master George would have carried himself with more confidence and composure. Ye Gentle Knight indeed ! Josiah Wedgewood was angry with Josiah Wedgewood. He let himself in with his latchkey, took off his hat and coat, and crept down to The Rookery like a depressed dog into its kennel. Mr. Clapp kept a piano in the Rookery, and sitting down on the stool and opening the lid of the keyboard, he let his fat fingers rest upon the notes. It was an oldish piano, and the ivory had a yellow tinge.

“ Damn it,” thought Mr. Clapp, “ you’re growing old and long in the tooth like I am.”

The secret lover in him protested. Music, music, colour, splendour, escape into those other passionate mysteries of sound and symbolism. Mr. Clapp played one of Brahm’s waltzes, and feeling soothed and regenerated, he broke into song.

Drink to me only with your eyes
And I will pledge with mine.

He swayed to and fro on the stool, and with head thrown

back suffered the man in him to escape in song. Oh, lovely melody, oh sweet emotion ! He did not hear his wife's footsteps in the hall, or the opening of the door.

“ Wedgewood.”

Mr. Clapp's hands died upon the keys.

“ Yes, my dear.”

“ The wretched butchers has sent chops instead of rump steak.”

“ Dear, dear, what a tragedy ! ”

“ I want you to take the chops back, Wedgewood.”

“ Is it necessary ? ”

“ Of course. You have nothing to do if you can sit there and sing in the middle of the morning. I've put the chops in the basket. It is in the hall.”

Mr. Clapp raised his hands and brought them down with a crash upon the keys.

“ To hell with rump steak. I'll have chops for lunch.”

“ Really, Wedgewood ! ”

“ I said ‘ Chops ’, Charlotte. Chops, chops, chops. If you must have the rump, send Ellen to the butchers.”

“ Don't be so vulgar, Wedgewood.”

Mr. Clapp began to play “ God Save the Queen ” with rolling emphasis.

“Go and buy rump steak at the Albert Memorial, Charlotte.”

Mrs. Clapp slammed the door.

II

ANN HYDE climbed the stairs, a Mona Lisa smile upon her face. Tears, idle tears, but they had passed, with that dear, fat, preposterous creature tumbling over his own emotion at her feet. Nice creatures like Mr. Clapp were so Georgish in their sudden, ingenuous devotions. But this day had another meaning now that the news of Rachel was so happy, for, in a sense, it was to be the birthday and the test-day of her husband's precious child now that the child of flesh and blood was safely away, that other child of metal was to show its paces.

As she climbed up and up, she could hear the muffled beat of this iron heart. Uncle James would be there, with two black eyes twinkling on either side of his Wellingtonian nose. Maria would be at their Bluebeard's window, busily crocheting beside the bonneted bust but keeping sharp eyes on the world below. Ann Hyde paused to listen, one hand against her cheek. Yes, there was no break in that

steady rhythm, no stuttering, no hesitation. In those experimental days there had been spluttering and sudden, depressing cessations. The thing would spit, and then stop with a kind of sad and exasperating sigh.

She reached the padded door, and knocked.

“ It’s Ann.”

“ Locked up below ? ”

“ Yes.”

He opened the door to her. He was in his shirt sleeves, and his face had a fierce, triumphant sheen.

“ Thought I heard the bell.”

“ It was only Mr. Clapp. Everything went off happily.”

He closed the door and stood leaning against it. She saw Uncle James smoking a pipe, a rug over his knees, but it was the steel thing on its massive bench which held her dark eyes in a concentrated stare. It chugged away oilily. From a feeding-tank perched on a bracket a brass pipe led the fuel to a brass pot beside the single cylinder. Valves clicked up and down on their tappets. Another and large pipe, supported on iron standards bolted to the floor, carried the fumes away into the chimney. There was silence save for the engine’s steady detonations.

“ She’s been running for half an hour without a hitch.”

She saw him step forward and lay a hand upon the cylinder.

“ Not too hot. It was that last fiddle-faddle I fitted to the carburettor. Just the right amount of juice, just enough vaporisation.”

He stood there smiling, head up, ironically exultant ; and she loved him. She slipped to his side, and clasped his arms.

“ John, I’m so —— ”

“ What ? ”

“ Happy.”

Hyde’s arm went round her. He glanced at Uncle James.

“ What do you think of that for a wife ? ”

“ She’s run her test.”

“ By God, she has ! What a lot I have to make up to you, Nan.”

She let her head rest on his shoulder.

“ Perhaps this is the great day, the greatest of all.”

Again there was silence while they watched the engine steadily turning. It seemed to say “ I’m alive, I’m alive. No more coughings and sputterings. I go. Switch me off and try me again.” Hyde reached out and snapped a switch over. The engine sighed and stopped. He waited for half a

minute and then gave a turn to the iron handle pinned to the end of the crank-shaft. The thing came to life, sweetly and without effort.

Uncle James was pointing with the stem of his pipe. "Say, John, I had better keep that brass valve in my safe. Will she unbolt?"

"She will."

"That's where her secret soul lives, what!"

"It does."

"And your last lot of plans?"

Hyde walked across to a desk which stood under a gas-jet in a corner. He gathered up some papers and clipped them together. "They would be safer in your bank."

Uncle James winked at him.

"I'm driving there this afternoon. Sure there is nothing left to help them if they should break in?"

"Yes, quite a lot."

Hyde turned back to the desk, and collecting another sheaf of papers, displayed them to Mr. Guy.

"Nice bait. Everything just wrong. If they walk off with these they will waste months producing the first model, only to find it won't work."

"What about the engine, my lad?"

“ Rather bulky and heavy to carry away in a Gladstone bag, I think.”

“ We had better apply at once for a patent, John.”

“ Question of money, sir.”

“ That’s my affair. You supply the brains ; I bring in the cash.”

III

IT was flat country, oh, so very flat, a grey sky, brown fields, rows of poplars, meadows, dykes, thorn hedges, with an occasional church spire sudden and splendid rising from nowhere into nothingness. Rachel looked out of her window. She thought of the sky as a great bowl of grey glass turned upsides down upon a vast brown table. She had been sick in the train. What humiliation ! Dr. Gregson had sacrificed his copy of The Times, and Mrs. Gregson a handkerchief. “ I’m afraid I’m going to be sick,” and Dr. Gregson had twisted his newspaper into a cone and thrust it at her. “ Into that, old lady ”. They had been very kind of her ; her nausea and its subsequent nastiness seemed to have produced no shocked squeamishness in George, but she still felt chilled and ashamed. These people might be

kind, but they were strange to her, and she was going to a strange house full of other strange people.

George came and sat beside her. Had she but known it, he would have given her his top-hat to serve as a receptacle.

“That’s Whaplode. Nearly there.”

He was excited. He was not able to keep still during those last few minutes. The train was travelling slowly, and he let down the window and put his head out.

“Mind your hat, young man.”

George removed his hat. The cold air played upon Rachel’s face, and made her feel better. She was still clutching a soiled handkerchief.

“I can see the church, and those poplars.”

“I came, I saw, and I caught a cold,” said his father; “up with the window, my lad. Other people may not like draughts.”

George glanced at Rachel.

“I’m sorry.”

She found her first smile.

“It is so nice and fresh.”

Dr. & Mrs. Gregson exchanged glances. Her kinder eyes said to his ironic ones, “Let them have it open. We’re quite near.” George’s head and shoulders were out of the

window. The train was running into Holbeach.

“ I can see Uncle Will.”

He turned and caught one of Rachel’s hands.

“ Come and look. See, there’s Uncle Will, over there by the railings. He’s got Polly. And there’s Tom.”

She joined George at the window, but the station buildings slid between them and the yard, and Uncle Will and Tom were blotted out.

Mary Gregson had her by the hand. They were passing through the ticket office, while Dr. Gregson saw to the luggage. George, presenting his own ticket to the collector, had rushed out to greet Uncle Will. They were great cronies, these two, and George hung on to Uncle Will’s arm, while Tom Tory held the heads of both horses.

“ Oh, Uncle, Rachel’s been sick.”

Strange how these two understood each other, perhaps because both man and boy were by nature fearless. As a young man Uncle Will had suffered from a fearsome temper, and his strength having been as fierce as his temper, other men had feared him. He had been known to tackle the most dangerous poacher in three parishes, wrest the fellow’s gun out of his hands, and break it as he might have snapped a lath, but Uncle Will had become the aged lion, a man who

had discovered gentleness, and who wrote poetry and grew roses.

Rachel looked at Uncle Will. She saw a man with very blue eyes, a grizzled tawny beard, all brown as to clothes and skin, and of a breadth that was immense. There was kindness here, an instant and large kindness that made the blue eyes easy to look into.

“ This is Rachel, Uncle.”

Rachel put out a hand that disappeared in a big brown paw.

“ How do you do, Uncle Will ? ”

“ The better for seeing you, my pretty.”

His hairy face bent down to the child's, and in the kiss they shared there was for Rachel warmth and assuagement.

It was Uncle Will who lifted her into the funny old governess-car.

“ You'll sit by me, my dear. Now then George. Next to Rachel. Mother and father on the other side.”

George was shaking hands with Tom Tory.

“ Can I go out with your gun, Tom ? ”

“ We'll see about that, Master George.”

“ Come on my lad. Christmas cake is waiting.”

George climbed in beside Rachel, and sat down close to

her. Dr. Gregson appeared, followed by a porter with truck and luggage.

“Hallo, Uncle Bill. How’s everybody?”

“Not wanting a doctor, thank’ee.”

“Well, that’s splendid. I’m not feeling professional.”

The car swung out of the yard and through the somnolent old town and into the country. A great winter sun pushed its red face suddenly through the greyness. George and Rachel sat very close, holding hands.

“There’s Christmas cake for tea.”

“Greedy fellow,” said his father.

“I’m not. It’s Rachel.”

“First out to the lady!”

Uncle Will smiled in his beard, and looked ahead over Polly’s ears. Sometimes the son was sharper than the father, which might be good for the father. Uncle Will was of the opinion that Dr. Corrie was sometimes a little too easy and complacent, and too facetious in his treatment of his elders.

They turned down a lane, and George stood up, holding on to Uncle Will’s shoulder.

“There’s the white gate! And there’s Aunt Amelia!”

A buxom figure in black was waving a handkerchief, and

George waved back. The Hurn said of Miss Amelia that someone had missed a good wife, but that is another story.

CHAPTER 21

MR. CLAPP'S usual custom was to spend the holidays in thanking God that he was free of the young for three or seven weeks, and in dabbling in water-colours and playing the piano, and in taking walks of immense compass, to Kew or Hampton, or round about old Chelsea, and Epping. That was one method of combating obesity, but during this particular Christmas week Mr. Clapp confined himself to prowl about Islington, Canonbury & Highbury, like a large and cunning animal threading the jungle paths, and shadowing other and more sinister beasts. For so heavy a man he could walk fast and with a rolling, oily stealth, hat pulled well down, a muffler hiding half his face. Mr. Clapp the romantic, was taking this service with infinite seriousness. Each night he would patrol the purlieus of the Painswick Road and Sussex Terrace, varying his times and the direction of his circuits. Even the two back gardens with their black hollies and their privets were not forgotten, for the disciples of Bismarck might prefer to use back doors.

Mr. Clapp's service was a secret service, devotion unfurled like an invisible carpet before the feet of

Beauty. Mr. Clapp might pause in silent adoration outside the door of No. 1, and raise his hat to the presence within ; but he was no impudent Lotharic. Love, especially illicit love, made him so devilishly shy. Illicit ! That was a beastly word, the sort of word that the legal profession cultivated. Mr. Clapp thought of his passion as secret and sacred. After all, he liked John Hyde and could call him friend.

Mr. Clapp wrote a sonnet in the Shakespearean manner. Pouring yourself out on paper or in a song did relieve the sweet anguish, and was it not a lovely anguish ? It gave a new and mysterious meaning to life, a smarting vividness, a splendid significance. Even shop-windows were different. You might see a particular bonnet or scarf or pair of gloves as inevitably hers. Ripe fruit had more colour. Even the turkeys hanging in a poulterer's shop, and decorated with swags of holly were birds of symbolic meaning. Could he send the Hydes a turkey for Christmas ? No, hardly, it might suggest penury, and Old Mother Hubbard. But he might send No. 1 flowers, and perhaps some fruit. He did so, or attempted to do so, and a silly shop man had the tribute delivered at No. 2.

Charlotte accepted it. The tribute was hers. How very

nice of Wedgewood to be so gallant.

Mr. Clapp, blundering in upon the contretemps, was kissed on the right cheek.

"Such lovely fruit, Wedgewood. I had to have one grape. We'll keep them for Christmas day."

Mr. Clapp was mute. Well, well, well ! Thank Heaven, he had not tucked a card in among the flowers ! The offering was to have been anonymous. Had there been a card, Charlotte might have sulked for a week. But Mrs. Clapp's reaction to this gallant act was not wholly positive. Now, why ? There was something funny about Wedgewood. Restlessness ? Yes. He was always going out at strange hours, and most elusively so. Mrs. Clapp, having been brought up in a religious family, had been bred upon suspicion, so much so that she should have wondered why God had walked in the garden in the cool of the evening. Had he had designs upon Eve ? Charlotte had been taught to believe that when a man behaved mysteriously, the inspiration was either wine or woman.

There were no tears, idle tears, no irresponsible joy of the morning, no sunset ecstasies in her make up. When a phase of life puzzled her, she challenged and catechised it. Now, just why had Wedgewood given her flowers ? There

was a cynical saying in Mrs. Clapp's circle, that when a husband presented you with chocolates or Eau de Cologne he had something to conceal.

Mrs. Clapp waited for one of those occasions when Wedgewood yawned, stretched, made some perfectly futile remark, and hinted that he had some work to do in the Rookery. Charlotte allowed him to go downstairs. She was alert, brittle, pinched of nose. When some thirty seconds had elapsed, she twitched her bustle to the door, opened it, and looking over the banisters, caught Mr. Clapp in the act of putting on his overcoat.

"Where are you going, Wedgewood?"

"Just a stroll, my dear. Exercise, you know."

Mrs. Clapp sniffed.

"It is very extraordinary, Wedgewood, how you are always going out."

"And coming in, Charlotte."

"I don't see any difference."

"There is all the difference between heaven and hell. I supposed you think, my dear, that I've got a woman."

"Don't be so vulgar, Wedgewood. Such low thoughts."

"Never enter your head?"

"Of course not."

“ Oh, don't they ! I am going out, Charlotte, because I like going out. Nor do you appreciate the significance of my coming in.

“ If you will talk such nonsense ——

“ There is a mystery in nonsense, my dear. Go back to your chaste chair. I neither whore nor drink.

“ Wedgewood, how dare you use such a disgusting word ?

“ Well, it's in the bible, my dear. What about Rahab !

That had been one of Mr. Clapp's perpetual problems, how much to tell Charlotte, and how much not to tell her. Oh, the illusions of sex ! He had married a pretty young thing with a sweet cooing voice, only to discover that his wife had the mind of a smutty conceited schoolgirl of sixteen, and she had remained in that state. Mr. Clapp closed the front door with deliberate emphasis, and stood a moment under the street-lamp, considering the windows of the two houses, and the romantic significance of their interiors. Now, if he had married —— ? But wasn't that rather unfair ? God had fitted out poor Charlotte with a bric-a-brac mind in a nice brassy exterior, and he had been fooled by the blond blandishments of that exterior. But the present problem was urgent. How much did Charlotte know about this affair, and how much ought she to know ? If she

knew too little or too much, her possible interference might be equally unfortunate. You could not keep Charlotte from interfering, or from gossiping. All that she might be presumed to know was that the Hydcs were rather unusual people, and that, in itself, would be a provocation. Would it not be wise to spin Charlotte a little story, tell her that the Hydcs and the Gregsons happened to be old friends, and that the two children had rediscovered the friendship for their elders ? Did Charlotte know where Rachel had gone for Christmas ? Yes, probably, but she did not know the real reason of it, and it was better that she should not know it.

Mr. Clapp turned up the collar of his overcoat, pulled his hat down over his eyes and set off on his nightly patrol. It did occur to him that he might be indulging in a fantastic and useless adventure, and that as a devoted watch-dog he might be rather absurdly superfluous, but when a middle-aged man is in love, his imagination transcends his reason. Mr. Clapp liked to think of himself as the devout and secret champion parading the dark places of the world in order that the evil thing might be flouted. Oh, faithful and passionate heart, with the red rose of romance at its lips!

Mr. Clapp swung into the Painswick Road. He passed the end of the passage beyond Rye House, and saw it as a cleft of gloom between the high brick garden walls. Should he explore it? He hesitated, and then moved on, deciding to traverse the passage at the end of his beat. He would be out for an hour, and the night was young. Moreover Mr. Clapp's forethought had made him string lengths of black cotton along the top of the garden walls, and if that cotton were broken, then he might suspect secret intrusions. But, of course, a breakage might be due to cats. They made love and fought upon these walls. In fact, he had not gone ten yards when he heard that weird and discordant battle-cry. Damn the cats!

Yet, had Mr. Clapp strolled a little way down that passage he would have discovered a man leaning against one of the walls. His failure to search that dark and narrow way was to be the cause of exasperating complications.

II

HERR OTTO SCHULTZE rang the bell of No. 2 Sussex Terrace. He carried in his hand a little posy of Christmas Roses, a pure emblem that could be presented without

embarrassment to the kind and charming lady. Herr Schultze raised his hat to Ellen when she opened the door two inches, for *la politesse* was the password for the night.

“ Herr, Clapp, he in is ? ”

Coo, it was the German gentleman with the lovely voice and the so distinguished manner. Ellen had listened on the stairs to Herr Schultze’s manly tenor.

“ No, sir, the master’s out.”

Herr Schultze looked very disappointed.

“ Ach, so, how unfortunate. And the lady ? ”

“ Yes, the missus is in.”

“ I here have a little offering for her.”

He displayed the flowers to Ellen, and Ellen, being foolish and sentimental when a gentleman stood six feet high and had a figure like a guardsman, did what Herr Schultze had expected of her. She asked him to step inside. Mrs. Clapp might be glad to receive him.

“ Step into the dining room, sir. I’ll go up and see.”

Ellen turned up the gas, leaving Herr Schultze holding his hat and the flowers, bounced upstairs, and knocked at the drawing room door.

Mrs. Clapp was very insistent upon the etiquette of knocking.

"Come in."

"It's that nice German gentleman, m'am. I told him the master was out."

"Herr Schultze?"

"Yes, m'am. He's brought some flowers."

Mrs. Clapp became bright and animated. She had been looking peaked and peevish.

"I think, Ellen, you might ask Herr Schultze to come up. It would seem unkind, I think, to send him away. Mr. Clapp may be back at any minute."

"Yes, m'am. Shall I ask him to step up?"

"Yes, Ellen, please do."

When Ellen had gone, Mrs. Clapp jumped up, looked at herself in the mirror, patted her hair and smoothed her skirts. She reseated herself, rather self-consciously so, with Victorian dignity, and spread her petticoats, and pushed her bracelets lower on her wrists. She was ready to receive Herr Schultze whom Ellen was helping off with his overcoat.

Herr Schultze entered the room, carrying his flowers, and Ellen closed the door behind him and remained to listen. Herr Schultze clicked his heels together, bowed, stepped forward and presented his bouquet as to a regal

person.

“ A leetle offering to madame.”

Mrs. Clapp simpered.

“ How charming of you, Herr Schultze. What lovely flowers ! ”

She took the posy in her left hand, and extended her right hand to Herr Schultze. He bent and saluted it.

“ Madame, your devoted servant.”

Herr Schultze was a man who knew his woman's world, and had learnt to convey by his manner many more subtle things than he said. A woman's hand might be just cold fish, or a warm and lovely provocation. He kissed Mrs. Clapp's hand with the suggestiveness of a thrill of pleasure, and again Mrs. Clapp simpered. How charming were these foreign manners ! How little did she suspect that the young German was saying to himself that it was necessary to placate the piece of boiled mutton.

“ Herr Clapp not at home is. I am sorry.”

His almost roguish glance insinuated other things. It was very nice to be alone with the lady.

“ My husband will be in any minute. Please sit down, Herr Schultze. Take that chair. It is comfortable.”

Schultze turned the chair towards her, and sat down like

a courtier in the presence of a high and gracious lady.

“ I must not stay long, I fear. I a German friend have who ill is.”

“ Dear, dear, I do hope it is not serious.”

“ The poor man has what you the consumption call. Most sad. And so leetle money.”

“ How very sad. And how kind of you.”

Herr Schultze gave a deprecating shrug.

“ I do a leetle, what I can. But this a happy moment is. Let us not of unhappy feelings speak.”

He ogled the lady, and Mrs. Clapp became self-conscious and coy. She put the flowers to her lips.

“ Like these, Herr Schultze.”

“ Yes, beautiful things, and —— ”

He became hesitant, betraying a nice air of sudden shyness.

“ So, Georgie has left you.”

“ Yes. Holidays.”

“ And how is the nice leetle girl next door ? She has the measles.”

Mrs. Clapp stared.

“ Oh no, I think not. She has gone away with George and his parents.”

“ Ach, so, glad I am. The Christmas holidays ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ To Georgie’s home in Hastings ? ”

Again, Mrs. Clapp stared.

“ Not Hastings, Southend. But they have gone to Lincolnshire for Christmas.”

“ Ach, so,” said Herr Schultze again, and his face became a little less sentimental. Now, what was the meaning of this ? Why had that damned boy told him that the girl had measles, if she had not measles. And not one of his watchers had discovered the fact that the child had left No. 1 Sussex Terrace. Mrs. Clapp, observing Herr Schultze, wondered why his face had gone so hard and flat.

“ Lincolnshire, where is that ? ”

Mrs. Clapp explained the position of Lincolnshire. And did she know exactly —— ? But Herr Schultze pulled himself up, and suddenly changed the subject. He began to talk music to the lady, while keeping an eye on the mantelpiece clock. He was not eager to meet Mr. Clapp, perhaps because he had begun to suspect Mr. Clapp of having had some hand in the business. But why ? Herr Schultze talked about Schubert & Strauss. Did the lady not adore the Strauss waltzes ? Yes. And he was sure that she

could waltz quite beautifully. Madame had the figure. He kept up this polite palaver for ten minutes, and then, with a shrug, and a lift of the eyebrows, deplored the necessity of leaving her.

“ My poor friend, he expects me.”

Herr Schultze rose.

“ My compliments to Herr Clapp. Say, please, I so sorry was to him miss. And may we have a leetle music some evening ? Yes ? ”

Mrs. Clapp was just a little puzzled, and a little disappointed.

“ With pleasure. I am so sorry you must go.”

“ My poor friend.”

“ Yes, of course. So kind of you.”

Herr Schultze surprised Ellen sneaking down the stairs. He was abrupt with Ellen. He swept past her, hurried into his overcoat, and was out of the house without so much as a goodnight ! All suggestions of suavity had departed from him. His long, swinging legs seemed to kick the air, and his heels to smack the paving stones. Halfway up the Painswick Road he stopped in front of a row of squat, snub-nosed little houses, and opened a gate. Two long strides brought him to the door. He raised the knocker and gave

three fierce raps.

A man opened the door, a moonfaced man in his shirt sleeves, bespectacled, bulging as to belly.

“ Schmidt, you have watched that house ? ”

“ Yes, captain.”

“ You swine-dog, you lie.”

Schultze swung a fist and smashed it in the fellow's face. His spectacles fell off. He grunted, and staggered against the wall. Schultze, in a white frenzy, swung a leg and let his boot bury itself in the soft pillow of the fellow's belly. This time his grunt was deeper and more anguished. He doubled up, showing his bald head, his hands clasped over his stomach.

“ Mein Gott ! ”

“ You swine-dog. That loses you a good job,” and Herr Schultze walked out of the gate and up the Painswick Road towards Highbury.

III

MR. CLAPP let himself in with his latchkey and met Ellen in the hall, carrying in the supper tray. Something smelt good, and Mr. Clapp was hungry ; all this exercise might

help to reduce fat, but it also produced a most healthy appetite.

“Steak and onions, Ellen.”

“Yessir. The German gentleman’s been, sir.”

“What?”

“The German gentleman what sings.”

“Did you let him in?”

“Yessir. The missus saw him.”

The news so stimulated Mr. Clapp that he went bounding up the stairs, still wearing his overcoat and carrying his hat. Damn these women! What had the fellow been after? Surely, Charlotte had not —— Mr. Clapp reached the landing, breathing hard, and here he pulled upon the reins of his own rather tumultuous purpose. It would not do to upset Charlotte unnecessarily. Perhaps she had not told Schultze anything that might have been useful to him. Mr. Clapp paused for a few seconds to get his breath, and to put his face in order, and then, like an actor, made his entry.

He saw his wife sitting by the fire with something white in her lap. Flowers! So, the Schultze scoundrel —— Mr. Clapp was bland and cheery.

“Supper, my dear. It is really very warm tonight.”

Charlotte appeared to be in one of her haughty moods.

“ Then, why do you keep your overcoat on in the house, Wedgewood ? ”

She picked up the white flowers and put them to her nose, and Mr. Clapp understood that she was pleased with the trophy, and was determined that he should appreciate its significance.

“ Overcoat ! So I have. Rushed up to tell you that supper is going in. What pretty flowers, my dear.”

“ Herr Schultze brought them,” said the lady, “ Christmas roses. So pure.”

“ Like the gentleman ! ”

Mrs. Clapp gave him an oblique and brittle glance.

“ Herr Schultze was so sorry to miss you, Wedgewood.”

“ Charming fellow. And did he inquire after my health ? ”

“ A most kind and courteous young man. He had to visit a sick friend. One should think of other people, Wedgewood.”

“ Of course, my dear. And did Herr Schultze think —— ? ”

“ Yes, of George. He seems very fond of children. He even remembered the Hyde girl.”

“ Did he indeed ! ”

“ He wanted to know if she was better. Who said she had measles, Wedgewood ? ”

“ Did Herr Schultze mention measles ? ”

“ Most certainly he did.”

“ And you told him, I supposed —— ? ”

“ That she couldn't have had measles, because she had gone away with the Gregsons for Christmas.”

“ Into Lincolnshire.”

“ Well, that is so, isn't it, Wedgewood ? ”

Mr. Clapp looked at his wife with exasperated pity.

“ You are a damned fool, Charlotte.”

“ Wedgewood ! How dare you ! ”

“ Yes, and you don't know why. You never will know why.

Well, I apologise. You can't help it.”

CHAPTER 22

CHANTRY FARM sent its smoke straight up into the heavens, for the stillness of frost was in the air, yet, to Rachel this old house was never still. Its life was the life of the land, and to this sensitive child all the many things that happened in and about it were wonderful and lovely. Chantry Farm might be active, but it suffered from no restlessness ; its rhythm was steadfast and happy and wholesome. Rachel, waking in her feather-bed, and what a bed it was, a warm white cloud that engulfed her, would hear all sorts of strange sounds, the clank of milk-pails, perhaps the hum of the churn, the voices of the two country girls, Jane & Lizzie, Aunt Amelia's deep rich declaiming as she gave her orders, the distant lowing of cattle, cocks crowing, Peter the collie barking at something or somebody. Rachel would snuggle down and listen. Other voices murmured in the next room. A barrow trundled down the garden path. Chantry Farm was up and stirring before the sun rose, but guests were not expected to appear till breakfast time. And what a breakfast ! Ham and eggs, and sausages, and pork-pie, masses of yellow butter and strawberry jam, warm milk fresh from the cow, cream as you

pleased. Rachel had lost all homesickness. She was happy here. Everyone was kind. She and Uncle Will had begun what was almost a flirtation.

Footsteps in the passage, and someone knocking at her door.

“ Rachel.”

“ Yes.”

“ I say, come and see the beasts fed.”

“ I’m not up yet.”

“ Oh, bother. Do get up. And Tom’s going to weigh us on the granary scales.”

Chantry Farm seethed with life. There were the great steaming beasts in the fattening-house, and when you walked down the brick path beside the troughs at feeding-time, all these huge heads were within a foot of you ; they breathed in your face. There were the cows, the pigs, the hens, the geese, the great farm-horses, splendid beasts, Polly the cob, the pigeons, Peter the dog, and at least three cats who warred on rats and mice. There was the granary where you could take off your shoes and paddle in golden grain. You could hunt for eggs, here, there, and everywhere, and find them in the most unlikely places.

Tom Tory was carting dung, so, after breakfast Uncle Will

took the whole family to the granary, and weighed them on the scales. Mary Gregson was the first victim.

“ Much as usual, Mary.”

“ What a comfort.”

Dr. Corrie weighed thirteen stone, one pound, and Uncle Will was laconic about it.

“ Up half a stone. Too much dogcart. Putting on fat.”

Dr. Gregson was not pleased.

“ You’re cheating, Will.”

“ No, my lad. You can’t cheat the scales.”

Uncle Will became mysterious when he weighed the two children. He kept a broad back screening the weights. Rachel was on the scales, and George was inquisitive.

“ What’s she weigh, Uncle ? ”

“ That’s my business, young man.”

“ Oh, I say, Uncle, but —— ”

Uncle Will removed the weights, and taking a gardener’s pocket diary from his pocket, made a note in it.

“ Not so much as a sack of corn. Now on with you, Georgie.”

“ But, I say, Uncle, why —— ? ”

“ I’ve got a bet on.”

“ Who with ? ”

“ Myself. On with you, my lad. There’ll be a second weighing after Christmas. I’m betting that you put on seven pounds, and the lady five.”

George got on the scales.

“ And what if we don’t, Uncle Will ? ”

“ You’ll lose half a crown a’piece.”

“ Oh, I say, Uncle Will, that’s not fair.”

“Why not ? ”

“ We’ve got to eat so much.”

“ Grievance imaginary, young man. Now, stand still.”

Uncle Will’s passion was his garden, and a very notable garden it was, a mysterious place that had been created out of a flat piece of meadowland. Uncle Will had planted trees and hedges, and planted them so cunningly that the garden was full of twists and secret corners, sudden vistas and surprising bosky thickets. He had thrown up earth banks and covered them with ivy. There was a huge tunnel roofed with roses leading to a high white seat under an acacia, and when you had climbed the five steps to the seat you felt yourself on top of the world. At the moment Uncle Will’s garden was a winter-garden, but on a clear and frosty day with trees and hedges all silver and the lawns like grey silk, it remained a lovely and mysterious place, and

Rachel found it so.

George became a little jealous of Uncle Will and his garden, especially so when Rachel went and sat with Uncle Will in the warm greenhouse, and looked at the pictures of flowers that were to be. Uncle Will was a great rosarian, and he had a whole album full of pictures of the rose. Few children were interested in the history and the varieties of the rose, but Rachel was an exception. Uncle Will sat in an old basket chair, and she on a stool, and instead of telling her fairy tales the old man spun the web of the rose.

“That’s the damask rose. And here’s York & Lancaster. See the coloured stripes.”

George poking his face close to the glass, felt himself out of the picture. He opened the door, and kept it open.

“I say, Uncle.”

“Shut the door, my lad, and come in.”

George obeyed.

“I want to show Rachel the pigeon loft.”

“Do you!” said his uncle. “No place for a lady. Sit down and listen.”

George sat down on the staging, swung his legs and was most plainly bored. His Uncle ignored him. Let the young

wait upon age.

“ This is the Provence rose.”

Rachel was bending over the book, and her dark curls fell across her cheeks. She too was a rose, dark damask, and George looked at her and felt peeved. Why, when there were so many exciting things to do did Rachel want to look at pictures ? He fidgeted in protest.

“ I say, Uncle Will, do you think the ice will bear soon ? ”

“ Not if you are impatient, my son.”

“ Can’t we go and look ? ”

“ Run along and look.”

George slipped off the staging.

“ All right, I will.”

He waited at the door for Rachel, but Rachel remained with Uncle Will and his roses, and George left them, looking huffed. It really wasn’t cricket ; Uncle Will keeping Rachel there in that stuffy old house. George went off to the rickyard, and by way of protest and to show his metal, climbed up a half-open straw-stack and tobogganed down it. He was making his third descent, and bringing down waves of straw, when Uncle Joe appeared around the corner of the byre, spud under arm, his shabby old hat on the back of his head.

“Hi, you young devil, come off that.”

Uncle Joe could be a fierce old fellow, with a fearsome voice, and as a disciplinarian he was much less subtle than Uncle Will. George, with one glance at that brick-red face, slid down the straw, and fled. He did not hear Uncle Joe's exultant chuckle.

II

AUNT AMELIA had smuggled in a Christmas Tree. She had kept it concealed in the box-room over the kitchen, and while the family was at church, the tree was carried down by Jane and Lizzie, and placed on the table in the drawing room. Christmas dinner was to be an evening meal, for the farm hands and the maids feasted at mid-day in the Chantry kitchen, eating off platters of hollywood, and drinking their beer in great pewter tankards. As for the drawing room, it was a rather sober and musty room, save on these special occasions. The Great Bible and Shakespeare & Fox's Book of Martyrs were put away, and the table packed with presents round the Christmas tree. Aunt Amelia had stayed behind to decorate the tree with candles and coloured glass balls, and also to supervise the lavishness of the dinner.

The drawing room was kept locked. Aunt Amelia slipped into the room at six o'clock to light the lamp and the candles, and to see that the fire was as it should be. Uncle Joe was smoking his long clay by the fire, Uncle Will disguising himself as Father Christmas.

“ Now then, my dears.”

Aunt Amelia had heard Uncle Will descending down the stairs. Mary Gregson took Rachel's hand. George still moved to assert himself, strolled behind his father, his hands in his trouser pockets. As he passed Uncle Joe, Uncle Joe smiled at him, and there was a mischievous challenge in that smirk.

Rachel stood at gaze. Would there be presents for her, the stranger ? She did not want to be left out. Then Father Christmas flowed in upon them in scarlet robes and a hood, and with much white wool attached to his chin.

“ A happy Christmas, all.”

Rachel looked at him solemnly. She was wise in her enjoyment of the masquerade, and in Uncle Will's rendering of it.

“ How do you do, Father Christmas ? ”

“ The better for seeing you, my dear.”

“ Isn't he beautiful ? ”

George swaggered. This Father Christmas business could be overdone.

"I know who it is. Uncle Will, of course."

Father Christmas put out a great hand, took George by the collar, and held him dangling like a puppy.

"Little boys shouldn't be bumptious."

Maybe, George had been feeling too important, as the hero of his own particular Treasure Island, and the young, when in love, must spread a peacock tail. George, replaced upon the floor, fidgeted with a somewhat crumpled collar, and looked self-conscious and sulky. Golly, but Uncle Will was strong, perhaps stronger than Mr. Clapp! His father was eyeing him with professional disapproval. George might be entering the cub-phase, and he would have to be chastened. Mary Gregson helped her son to smoothe out his collar, and her downward glances were more compassionate, questioning, and tinged with regret. Was this the first insurgence of sex? George had been such a sensitive, unloutish child.

Uncle Joe strolled in with his pipe, and stood there like a sage and sardonic old bird. Uncle Will had taken his place at the table. Wise as to Rachel's waiting and troubled face, he picked up a particulate parcel.

“ Miss Rachel Hyde.”

He saw Rachel's eyes light up, and maybe he understood the inwardness of this sudden illumination. On this Christmas night the child was not to feel herself a stranger among strangers.

So, the table was emptied. Rachel had a lapful of presents, a paint-box, a work-basket all complete, a box of chocolates, a book, a pair of gloves. There was a watch for George from his father, more soldiers, a brass cannon. There was much untying of the string and rustling of paper, and surprised and delighted exclamations. Rachel, flushed and happy, went around kissing everybody, even Uncle Joe, who bent down to her like a benign eagle, but she did not kiss George.

The omission may have been rankled. The Gregson present to Aunt Amelia was a handsome Paisley shawl, and Aunt Amelia was delighted with it. She must try it on, and Mary Gregson arranged it for her. The men smiled tolerantly upon Aunt Amelia's quite girlish joy, and Rachel must needs go and stroke the rich fabric. Silly things shawls ! Why all this fuss ? This was not Treasure Island, and again George was provoked to assume a more notable place in the picture.

“ When’s dinner, Aunt Amelia ? ”

“ At once, dear. Are you so hungry ? ”

“ I am going to eat something of everything. You’ll see.”

His father tweaked his ear.

“ A Christmas gorge, my son, eh ? ”

“ I’ve got to put on seven pounds. Uncle Will said so.”

“ At one sitting ? You’ll be sick.”

George was piqued at having his capacity questioned.

“ No I shant.”

His mother looked at him consideringly.

“ Don’t show off, dear.”

“ I’m not showing off.”

Chantry Farm did not begin with soup. It marched straight upon the beef and the turkey. Uncle Will carved. George ate both beef and turkey, vegetables and Yorkshire pudding. He had two helpings of Christmas pudding and custard, and his father was observing him with a professional eye. Mince pies ? George ate two of them, and a slice of cheese-cake. Then came oranges, apples and nuts, and George was not to be frustrated. His mother was watching him with a suggestion of anxious interest. A boy should enjoy himself, yet, not quite so ostentatiously.

Crackers. The Chantry Farm table had been so full of

good things that Aunt Amelia had kept the crackers in their boxes.

“ George, dear, take the box round.”

George got up. He had done nobly and notably. He had proved the male capacity and maintained the reputation of the school, but he had begun to feel dreadfully distended. Those last nuts seemed to have added to the tightness of his tummy. He wanted to undo buttons. His mother, watching him, nodded meaningly in the direction of Aunt Amelia. George was to be gallant by pulling the first cracker with his aunt. Uncle Will's big brown paw came out, and possessed itself of a cracker. He held it out to Rachel.

George did not feel forestalled or peeved. He was feeling other things.

“ Pull one, Auntie.”

Auntie pulled one, and the prize remained with George. He passed the box to his father, unfolded a red, piratical cap, and putting it on, tried to feel jaunty. The cap emphasised the obvious to Mary Gregson. Her son was looking very pale.

Rachel was up, wearing a yellow crown, a cracker in each hand. She pulled the first with Dr. Gregson and went on to

share the second with George. George hiccoughed, which was mannerless to him, took hold of his end and pulled, but the thing was a fizzle.

“Yours,” said Rachel.

“No, you can have it.”

Oh, dreadful qualms, inward heavings, sudden nausea ! George hurried to the door, and tried to make an exit that should not be noticeable. His father and mother exchanged glances. Uncle Joe emitted a dry chuckle. Aunt Amelia looked troubled.

“I’m afraid —— ”

“Leave it to nature,” said Dr. Corrie, heartlessly, helping himself to port.

George got the porch door open just in time ; the wretched thing was locked and bolted ; and outside the dining room window nature had her way. The sounds of anguish could be heard in the room.

Mary Gregson pushed back her chair.

“No, leave him alone, Mary,” said her husband, “it’s nature. No need to worry. Teach the young beggar a lesson.”

It was Rachel, who, hearing those distressful sounds slipped behind Mary Gregson’s chair, and whispered to her

"I'll go." She was off before George's mother could make up her mind on the matter, whether her son would prefer to suffer this shame in the dark privacy of the garden. Rachel found the porch door open, and the frosty air flowing in. A slit of light escaping between the dining room curtains revealed to her a little doubled up figure, hands clasped over tummy, a figure that continued to be shaken by horrid spasms.

Rachel, remembering her own humiliation in the train, put her arm round the stricken George.

"I'm so sorry."

George gasped at her.

"Mind where you tread."

He was shivering, the chastened, contrite hero, purged of all proud flesh.

"You're shivering. Do come in."

"Can't yet," and the spasms continued.

Rachel stroked his bowed head.

"It's so horrid, isn't it. I know."

George was groping for a handkerchief.

"Sorry, I was such a pig. You haven't a handkerchief, have you? I've lost mine."

"Yes I have."

" Oh, golly, there it is again. I wish I hadn't —— "

" Here's the handkerchief. Do come in. You're so cold."

" I can't yet."

Uncle Will, who, hearing those two voices and the continuing sound of anguish, left his chair and walked out into the night. Leave it to nature, what ! Those two kids would catch cold.

" Come on, George, my son."

" Wait a minute, uncle."

" All right. Better go in my dear ; you'll catch cold."

George's teeth were chattering. It was Uncle Will who dared the soiling of his Sunday coat, and who carried George upstairs, undressed him, and put him to bed.

" Snuggle up and get warm, Georgie."

" Can I have a basin, uncle. I don't think it's over yet."

Uncle Will placed a basin on a chair beside the bed, and going to the door, met George's mother.

" Worst's over, I think."

Said a voice from the bed, " I'm sorry I was such a pig."

III

MR. CLAPP walked up and down Sussex Terrace in a state of

fluster that was both of the emotions and of the head. Something would have to be done about Charlotte's indiscretion and Herr Schultze's easy culling of vital information. Oh, vanity of vanities, a bunch of flowers and a cavalier's smile ! But could he blame Charlotte ? Was he not equally blameworthy in not having foreseen and forestalled the mischance ? He should have warned Charlotte not to let herself be pumped by the German but even if he had done so, would Charlotte have swallowed the story ? Most probably she would have said " Wedgewood, don't be so ridiculous. I don't believe a word of it. I am sure Herr Schultze is a perfect gentleman." Poor Charlotte ! She was that sort of woman, suspicious where she should have trusted, credulous when her vanity was fed.

There was no doubt about it. He would have to ring the bell of No. 1, and confront that ironic fellow Hyde, and bleat him to " I'm sorry. Afraid I have made rather a mess of things. That damned German called while I was out, and my wife gave the show away."

Mr. Clapp, glancing at the windows of No. 1, found the house completely dark. The thought that nobody might be at home somehow gave him the courage to ring the bell, for his confession might have to be postponed and slept upon.

He waited. There was no response, and conscious of relief, Mr. Clapp was about to fade away, when he heard a voice, her voice. She seemed to be speaking through the flap of the letter box.

“ Is that you, John ? ”

Mr. Clapp swung round, a large creature moved by sudden emotion.

“ No, I’m afraid it’s Mr. Clapp. I wanted to see your husband.”

“ I’m afraid he is out on business.”

“ Oh, never mind. Perhaps tomorrow.”

He had expected to hear the faint metallic sound that would betray the closing of the brass letter-flap, but something in his voice had disturbed her.

“ You have some news ? ”

“ Yes, I’m afraid —— ”

“ Wait, please.”

He heard bolts withdrawn, and a key turned. He supposed that she was alone in that mysterious house. How a small thing appealed to one’s chivalry ! He saw the white oval of her face, and the darkness of her Cassandra head.

“ You are Mr. Clapp ? ”

“ Oh, certainly. Please don’t be alarmed.”

He spoke with great gentleness, hat in hand, motionless.

“ Is it urgent ? ”

“ Rather so.”

She opened the door wider, and stood back. How symbolic was this act ! Mr. Clapp was profoundly touched. She trusted him.

“ My husband and Uncle James are interviewing a patent agent.”

Mr. Clapp stepped in.

“ That sounds good news.”

“ Oh, I hope so. Please take your coat off. I have a fire upstairs.”

She rebolted and relocked the door, and Mr. Clapp took off his overcoat. He was alone with her in the house. That too was a challenge to chivalry.

She had lit the gas jet in the hall, and had not Mr. Clapp turned his back to the door while waiting, he would have seen a fanlight come to life. Now that he could distinguish her more clearly he was aware of the tension of her dark eyes. She looked to him like a woman from whom fear was never very far away. Selfish beasts, men, especially those urged on by a creative ruthlessness, and perhaps John Hyde had taken all that she had to give, and

not gauged it's completeness.

He said quickly, " Oh, it's nothing very serious."

He saw her face soften, and her breasts rise under the tight black bodice. What a little thing she was ! He could imagine her palpitating like a bird.

" I wondered. Is it about ? "

" Yes, Rachel."

" Not ill ? "

" No."

She turned and as she moved towards the stairs, she shivered slightly, with a kind of tremulous shrug of the shoulders.

" It is cold here. Let's go to the fire."

Mr. Clapp followed her, suddenly sure that he would go through fire on her account. Great, adoring ass ! But was it not good to feel like that ? He wanted to touch her gently and say, " My dear, do not be afraid. There are those who will stand between you and fear." But how could he be sure of that ? Were there not secret hazards in other lives and fortunes which could not be conjured away by a romantic gesture ?

It was a very poor fire, especially so for Christmas week, and Mr. Clapp's urge was to lift the lid of the coal-box and

extract two or three good, hearty nuggets, but even coal-boxes might be sensitive. Let it be her privilege and right to add coal to the fire, and if she so wished it, and if there was coal in the box. Mr. Clapp doubted it, and was unwilling to open empty cupboards. That, too, was chivalry.

“ Please sit down.”

He was careful to leave her the best chair, but she ignored it, and going on her knees before the fire, lifted the lid of the coal-box, and groped in it with a ridiculous little pair of tongs. There could not be much coal in the box for the tongs and her hand disappeared into the depths, and after some fumbling found one small lump. It slipped out of the tongs, however, before it reached the fire, and crashed in the fender. She flinched, and drew her breath in sharply.

“ So sorry.”

Mr. Clapp was up, urged towards intervention.

“ Let me.”

“ Oh, please don't bother. I can manage.”

She recovered the lump with her fingers and placed it on the fire. Were there any more lumps in the box ? She explored it and found one more.

“ So silly of me. I forgot to fill it.”

Mr. Clapp divined the defensive falsehood. She knelt there, still holding the tongs, and looking like a girl in a day-dream. But not a happy dream. Fear was somewhere, not very far away.

“ Now, tell me.”

“ I’m afraid those people discovered that Rachel has gone.”

She turned her head and looked at him.

“ But how ? ”

“ I’m terribly afraid it was my fault, in a way. While I was out, that fellow Schultze called, and my wife saw him.”

He was conscious of her eyes hardening.

“ Does the man visit you, then ? ”

“ Yes, believe me, it was part of our strategy. I wanted to find out more about the fellow. The velvet glove, you know. I’m afraid my wife gossiped. She did not realise —— ”

“ Does he know where Rachel is ? ”

“ Only that she has gone down into Lincolnshire with the Gregsons.”

She was gazing again at the fire.

“ Is that so very serious ? ”

“ Well, perhaps, not as serious as I feared. But it spoils their plot. What seems to me more serious is —— ”

He paused, realising that he might frighten her, but she had lived with fear, and had taught herself to confront it. She clasped her hands about her knees. Her stillness was the stillness of tense thinking. Yes, if these Germans had been foiled in their plan for procuring a hostage, they would turn to other expedients, and the danger might come from some other direction. Supposing —— ? Mr. Clapp was watching those clasped hands, with their interlocked fingers. They seemed white with strain.

He said, “ I was going to shirk it, but may I say what I had in mind ? ”

“ Yes, do.”

“ I don't think you ought to be alone here.”

“ I am not quite alone. Oh, but of course you don't know. You see we have a secret door upstairs between this house and Uncle James. Maria is there. I can always go to Maria.”

“ An Italian ? Is she —— ? ”

“ Oh, yes, utterly so, I'm sure. She hates all Tadeschi.”

“ Thank you for telling me. I value that.”

She gave him a quick, sidelong glance.

“ One feels one can trust certain people.”

Mr. Clapp blushed.

“ Dear lady, that makes me glad. But just two women together. There ought to be —— Will your husband be long ? ”

“ No, any minute now.”

“ May I wait until —— ? ”

Her face was turned again to the fire.

“ Yes. Won't you smoke your pipe ? ”

“ May I ? ”

“ Of course. John smokes everywhere.”

CHAPTER 23

A MAN who has been struck in the face may cease to be a willing servant, and Schultze, in playing the sergeant-major to the wretched Schmidt, had lost a most sedulous and cunning shadow. Schmidt's window commanded the doors of No. 1 and of Rye House, and had he been watching that day he might have seen Mr. John Hyde leave Rye House with Mr. Guy and enter Tom Trite's four-wheeler. That alone might not have been of no particular significance, but Schmidt would have made the curious discovery that Hyde had emerged from a particular front-door without leaving his own front door, and Schmidt would not have missed so peculiar a piece of conjuring. Moreover, Schmidt who had orders to follow Mr. Hyde, might have tracked Tom Trite's cab to its destination, for Schmidt, in spite of his paunch, was a nimble fellow and capable of sitting on back-axles like any urchin. Tom Trite's cab could have carried him to the nearest cab-rank, and thus Schmidt could have hailed a cab of his own, and followed uncle and nephew down to the city. He would have gazed upon that most suggestive of brass plates "Wise & Watkins - Patent Agents". But Schmidt was sulking and cherishing hatred and a black eye, and so

a piece of information that should have revealed to Otto Schultze the perilous ripeness of the situation, was lost to him. And in that revolt of a shadow were adumbrated the makings of a tragedy.

Uncle James and John Hyde were to return to Sussex Terrace in Tom Trite's cab about half past six. Admittedly, they loitered on the way, for Mr. Guy had stopped the four-wheeler in the most prosperous part of Upper Street. Uncle James' eyes were star-bright, and he had a purse full of sovereigns.

Mr. Wise, soon to be Sir Leonard Wise, was considered to be the most astute and distinguished authority upon patents and patent-rights in the country, and the interview with Mr. Wise had been excessively encouraging. He knew what the new world was seeking, and fumbling for, a source of power that would take to the roads, and herald the apotheosis of the horse. Mr. Wise had been waiting for some such viable invention to mature itself and to concentrate in its conception and construction the gropings of a generation. Hyde had it, and was ready to prove that he possessed it and Mr. Guy had both the courage and the capital to convert the inventor's dream into reality.

" Stop at Tranter's wine-shop, Trite."

" Yessir."

Uncle James bought two bottles of champagne.

" We'll make Nan break one on the bows of the adventure, John."

The wine had been put into the cab, and Trite told to drive on to Messrs. Roberts, and there Uncle James purchased a particular fur coat, which had been displayed in the Christmas window, and been coveted by half the ladies in Highbury. His nephew responded to this munificence with a secret and sardonic smirk. Mr. Guy, like many potent men who have never been short of money, was capable of large generousities, while remaining blind to life's minor necessities, such trivialities as coal and butter, milk, meat, and sound soles to your shoes. The Hyde pride had continued to be silent on these minor penuries. Moreover, it was possible that Uncle James revered the galliard grimness of King Edward at Crecy. Is the lad hurt, is he in mortal danger? No. Well, let him take the blows and win his spurs. Mr. James Guy was not a person to whom you whimpered.

" Home, Trite. Stop at No. 1."

" Yessir."

Uncle James tipped Tom Trite half a sovereign for Christmas, and Tom took off his hat to Mr. Guy.

“ You’re a gentleman, sir. The best of everything.”

“ Same to you, Tom. Give the mare double oats.”

“ I will, sir.”

John Hyde had rung the bell, but his wife, who had been listening and had heard the cab arrive, left Mr. Clapp by the fire and went down to open the door. As she drew the bolts her heart was beating out the question, “ What news, what news ? ” She saw her husband’s face, and knowing that face so well, was moved to sudden exultation.

“ It’s good ? ”

“ Could not be better.”

Uncle James was on the steps, with Trite behind him, for Tom was insisting on carrying in the wine and the parcel. Mr. Guy’s eyes were puckish. Nan was kissing John. Well, well, well, that was as it should be. Salutes and celebrations everywhere, a fur coat for the lady, and cock’s snooks to those damned Germans.

“ Put the wine on the hall table, Tom.”

“ Yessir.”

“ And give me the parcel. Have a good Christmas.”

“ Not ‘alf, sir.”

The door was closed and locked. Hyde had one arm round his wife, and with a free hand he collected a champagne bottle. Uncle James winked at him, and clasped his parcel.

“ A little glass now, John, wouldn't do us any harm.”

“ No, by God, sir, it wouldn't.”

And then Ann Hyde remembered Mr. Clapp. She had forgotten him, and that, so often, is the fate of supreme secret devotion.

She said, “ Mr. Clapp is here. He wanted to see you, and I asked him to wait.”

Hyde was in laughing, ironic mood, and he held up the champagne bottle. “ Clapp, Clapp, quite significant. He can supply the applause, yes, and join us in a glass. News of George ? ”

“ No. I'll tell you presently, or Mr. Clapp will tell you, I don't think it matters now.”

“ The latest rumour concerning the hereditary Swine Dogs ! Well, the wine is French, not German, though I do not think I love the French. Push in first and get the seat, and say pardon afterwards.”

Uncle James had the other bottle, and the parcel under his arm. He followed them up the stairs.

“ More French for madame, I think. One bottle now, John,

and the other for dinner.”

“ The more the merrier, Uncle Jim. What about glasses, my sweet ? Have we any ? ”

“ Only claret glasses, I’m afraid.”

“ Tut-tut,” said Mr. Guy, “go and ask Maria for my Venetian goblets. The patent is good, Nan. Our expert can prove it.”

Hyde entered the drawing room with his arm round his wife’s waist ; an embarrassed and secretly anguished Mr. Clapp stood with his pipe in one hand, the other waiting to be offered. The husband smiled at him with the innocent assurance of the man in possession.

“ Glad you’re here, Clapp. We are having a little celebration. Stay and join us.”

Mr. Clapp gave a kind of jumbo bow. He looked at the husband, and not at the wife.

“ Thanks, my dear fellow. If I’m not *de trop* ? ”

“ Hardly. Procure us the goblets, my sweet.”

Josiah Wedgewood winced. His fair lady ! But, of course ! Mr. Clapp watched her out of the room, and trying to be at ease, put a foot on the fender and an elbow on the mantelpiece. Uncle James sat down in Mr. Clapp’s chair, with his parcel on his knees. Hyde was holding the

champagne bottle up to the light, and examining the label.

“ Eighteen sixty nine all right, Uncle ”

“ Splendid.”

Mr. Clapp fidgeted. The mantlepice was draped with an Italian scarf, and Mr. Clapp did not notice that his elbow was dragging it into wrinkles.

“ Hyde, my dear fellow, while your wife is out of the room I'd like to tell you —— ”

“ The latest news ? ”

“ Those people know that Rachel has gone away with the Gregsons. I'm afraid it was my fault.”

Hyde threw the bottle up, caught it and laughed.

“ I don't think we need worry. We have cooked their goose. My completed plans are in the safe of my patent-agent.”

Mr. Clapp fidgeted, holding an extinguished pipe.

“ I hope they don't know that, Hyde.”

“ They don't. But why ? ”

“ Might not the knowledge make them rather desperate.”

“ I see what you mean. But what could the swine do ? ”

“ Well, yes, perhaps it might be better that they should know it. I think I was wrong. You see, my dear fellow —— ”

Hyde looked at him quizzically.

"I don't think we need worry now."

Mr. Clapp saw the door open, and Ann with four goblets on a tray. He made a sudden movement to correct his lounging attitude, and his elbow dragged the scarf still further over the marble slab. A vase which had been tottering on the edge fell with a crash onto the fender. Mr. Clapp was profoundly shocked. He bent down to discover the damage.

"Terribly clumsy of me. So sorry. I'm afraid it's ——"

"A good wholesome smash," said Uncle James, and chuckled.

Hyde was amused by Mr. Clapp's blundering and contrite confusion. What a simple Behemoth it was, but likeable, oh, very likeable. And how would Nan take it, her precious old piece of majolica? His wife was kinder than the husband. Mr. Clapp was picking up the pieces, the bald patch on his head pink with shame.

"Please don't bother, Mr. Clapp."

"I'm afraid it's precious. Dreadfully clumsy of me. Gubbio too, if I'm not mistaken."

Mr. Guy liked Josiah Wedgewood.

"Don't worry, sir. I gave it to Ann. I have another, and she can have it."

“ So clumsy of me.”

He left the pieces lying in the fender, and with a rolling, self-conscious movement tried to recover his poise. Bang went the champagne cork, eased out by Hyde's thumb. It hit the ceiling, and fell at Mr. Clapp's feet.

“ That's luck, my dear sir. Nan, the glasses.”

The wine was frothing out of the bottle, and while his wife held the tray, he filled the four glasses. Uncle James was presented with the first glass. Mr. Clapp found Ann Hyde standing in front of him with the tray, and looking with peculiar gentleness into his face.

“ Drink and forget,” said she.

“ I wish I could,” said Josiah Wedgewood, thinking of other anguish.

His hand was shaky, and Uncle James came to his assistance.

“ Now then, all of us, here's to the Hyde Internal Combustion Engine.”

Ann touched Mr. Guy's glass with hers, and then turned to her husband. Mr. Clapp saw the steadfast and beloved look she gave him, drank and drank too quickly, and fell into a splutter. Damnation, what an immeasurable ass he was making of himself, behaving like a frightened bull in a

china shop, instead of like a Master of Arts, and the occasional exhibitor of landscape in water-colour. The wine was running down his chin. Everybody was consciously refraining from looking at him. He found a handkerchief and mopped himself.

What could he do to recover his dignity ? Make a joke of the uppishness of the wine ? Propose a lady's health ? Yes, that was an idea. He cleared his throat, assembled an attitude and a smile.

" Now that my innocence has revealed itself, may I propose —— "

He caught Hyde's ironic eyes and floundered. Was it his business to propose healths, and to toast other men's wives ?

" Go on, old chap."

" I was about to suggest Mr. Guy as our toast."

" By Jove, yes. Uncle, to you."

Mr. Guy gave each one of them a jocund look. He had divined the source of Mr. Clapp's confusion.

" Wait a bit. Someone comes before me."

Uncle James rose, the parcel under one arm, his wine glass in his right hand.

" Nan, my dear, to courage and comradeship. And here, is a

small tribute."

"Nan, to you," said Hyde, gazing upon his wife.

"To you, madam," said Mr. Clapp.

He found himself with an empty glass, and burbling excuses. He really must be going. Letters to write. Yes, and his wife was all alone in the house. Hyde went downstairs with him, and let him out into the street.

"Goodnight and thanks. Look in again soon."

"Thanks, my dear fellow, I will."

Mr. Clapp floundered for his own door. What a deplorable mess he had made of the business. Idiot, ass, clumsy, buffoon! Where was his romance? Lying in a fender with a broken vase, and a spluttering over champagne.

II

UNCLE WILL, RACHEL & GEORGE went hand in hand down to the granary, Uncle Will like Atlas between two dancing amorini. There had been two nights of hard frost, and the ice on the big pit beyond the garden in the corner of the home paddock might be bearing tomorrow. Uncle Will had said that if he would tolerate his fourteen stone, then it would be safe for George and Rachel. Uncle Will, like many

very strong and bulky men, was an expert on the ice, cutting figures of eight, and other pretty figures, including his own. Pirouette — Uncle Will would not ; that was for dancing-masters and the very vain who must cut a figure before the ladies. Meanwhile, the solemn business of weighing in was to be consummated, and the fate of half-crowns decided.

Said Uncle Will slyly, as he unlocked the granary door, “ I’m afraid somebody’s minus a Christmas dinner.”

George looked at his uncle reproachfully. Need that scandal be revived ? George was furiously ashamed of it.

“ Oh I say, Uncle —— ! ”

“ Tut-tut, my lad, learn to take your leg pulling.”

Rachel was first on the machine. For so airy-fairy a creature she surprised Uncle Will, but the Chantry Farm larder was not that of No. 1 Sussex Terrace. Uncle Will read off the weight, felt in his pocket, and produced half a crown.

“ That’s your medal, my dear.”

Rachel stood, gazing big eyed into the bearded face.

“ Have I gained five pounds ? ”

“ You have. That will please Aunt Amelia. Now then, young man, your turn.”

Rachel stepped off the weighing-platform and Uncle Will removed the weights. George took Rachel's place. He was not a little anxious about the result, but failure to make the weight might have moral compensations. Uncle Will was very solemn over the business. He put on the final weight, and the balanced bumped down against George. Uncle Will readjusted matters until George was just topping the scales.

"No medal for you, George, I'm afraid."

"Oh, Uncle, you're teasing."

"Not a bit of it. Two and a half pounds short. Rachel's beaten you."

George got off the weighing-platform, looking depressed but thoughtful.

"Well, I can't have been so greedy, Uncle."

"That Christmas dinner, you know."

Why did Uncle Will keep rubbing it in? They might have been feeding the pigs.

"Then I don't get half a crown?"

Rachel's hand touched his.

"You can have mine, George."

George's face flushed up.

"Oh, no, I won't. Awfully nice of you, but I won't take

your half-crown."

"Do."

"No, I won't."

Uncle Will smiled in his beard.

"You can't refuse a lady, George."

"Must I?"

"Yes."

The half-crown passed from the girl's hand to the boy's, but Uncle Will had to enjoy his jest.

"That's right. Now, Rachel, my dear, here's another one for you."

She put up her face to be kissed, and George, provoked by the salute, hastened to copy his uncle.

"You can have mine too, Rachel, if you like."

"That's the gentleman, George. But she won't take it."

"Of course I shan't," said Rachel.

III

SKATES. Uncle Will had skates of his own, but three pairs were needed, for Dr. Corrie, Rachel & George. Mary Gregson was eschewing skates for certain reasons, since six months later she was to give George a sister. Polly was put into

the shafts, and off they trotted to Holbeach, Rachel sitting beside Uncle Will, George beside his father. Polly's shoes made a merry clatter on the frozen road, and the great poplars were still and glittering in the winter sunlight.

Dr. Corrie was in one of his teasing moods. He said that he was sure that all the skates would be sold before they arrived, even if the Holbeach ironmonger stocked skates.

“ Don't you think so, Will ? ”

Uncle Will did not think so. He & Dr. Corrie Gregson did not see eye to eye in many matters, for Uncle Will wrote poetry, and Dr. Corrie had no use for that sort of stuff. Uncle Will's verse left him tolerant and amused.

“ Who is going to pay for the skates if we find 'em.”

“ You can, Corrie,” said Uncle Will.

“ Oh, can I ! ”

Uncle Will gave his nephew one of his sudden, Scandinavian stares, a Viking look. It said, “ You will have had free board for a fortnight, my lad. Put that in your pipe and smoke it.”

“ Can I have ' Acmes ', Uncle Will ? ”

“ Acmes, George. What's that ? ”

“ The new kind. You haven't to screw them on.”

“ Never heard of them,” said Uncle Will, “ give me screws

and straps."

Holbeach was a pleasant old town, rather Dutch in feeling, with vistas that suggested Hobbema. A great white windmill raised its cowl and sails above the roofs. Uncle Will pulled up outside the principal ironmongers, and with a glance at Dr. Corrie, leaned over and opened the door.

"I'll look after the mare. I see skates in the window."

Dr. Gregson pulled a smile.

"I can manage the mare. Will, if you care to ——"

"No, my lad. I'm going on to the brewery. Beer's getting low in the cellar. Pick you up on the way back."

Dr. Corrie got out of the trap, for Uncles Joe & Will promised expectations, and obviously there were occasions when it was a policy to pay.

Skates were found for all of them, though George did not get his "Acmes". Rachel sat on a chair, for Dr. Gregson was insisting upon precision; Rachel had better take a boot off and have the heel bored and the skates fitted, for Dr. Corrie was paying. Rachel was troubled, not only because these boots were the only boots she possessed, but because she had divined in George's father a certain reluctance to part with cash. She had her half crown in her pocket, and

she produced it.

“ How much will they cost, please ? ”

George, who was waiting to be fitted, was shocked by her suggestion.

“ Father’s paying.”

“ Oh, but —— ”

“ Strike out like this,” said George, “ I’ll hold you up. Now, right feet together.”

They had not gone three yards when Rachel’s heels slid, and she tumbled, bringing George down with her. Dr. Corrie stood on his skates and laughed, but Uncle Will went gliding over to the tangle of arms and legs. Rachel had hurt herself ; she had bumped her head. Uncle Will, steady as a rock, picked her up and held her.

“ Hurt your head, lass ? ”

Rachel had gone very white, but George was red and feeling peeved.

“ It’s the back of my head, Uncle Will.”

“ Poor poppet.”

Uncle Will gathered her up and skated across to the bank where a chair stood, a chair that had been fitted with runners. He placed her in the chair.

“ Like to go in and lie down ? ”

“ No, I’ll be all right in a moment.”

“ Good girl. I’ll take you round in the chair. Air will do you good. Feel giddy ? ”

“ Just a little,” and she managed to smile.

He set off with her and was joined by George, eager to show off after the tumble he had taken. Also, he did not want Uncle Will to be too much the god in possession.

“ Feel better ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ I can do the outside edge, Uncle.”

“ Can you. Show us.”

George essayed it, tottered, slid, and came down with a flop.

“ Hurt yourself ? ”

“ No,” said George, redder than ever ; “ these skates want sharpening.”

“ Fudge,” said his uncle, “ pride goes before a fall. You’ll take plenty of tosses before you cut an eight.”

George got up, and dusted his knickers, and Uncle Will went off with the lady.

Mary Gregson and Aunt Amelia came down to watch them, with Peter the dog. Uncle Will had taken Rachel out of the chair and was giving her the first lesson. “ Don’t be

afraid. I'll hold you up, my dear." George had joined his father who was practising the Dutch Roll backwards, and George was feeling out of the picture.

"You skate as well as Uncle Will, pater. Show me the outside edge."

The flattery tempted Dr. Corrie to show off, especially so before the ladies, but he too came down with a splendid side-slip, just missing Peter the dog, who was running round them, smiling, and with his tongue hanging out. Dr. Corrie was annoyed ; his cap had come off, and he had bruised his arm.

"Damn that dog. He balked me."

George was a little shocked. Never before had he seen the parental dignity so badly damaged.

"Hurt yourself, pater ? "

"No," said Dr. Corrie curtly, and picked himself up.

"Go away, Peter," said George, "You're a damned dog."

Someone laughed on the bank, and Dr. Corrie heard it and went red. He took his son's hand.

"Come on, George, we'll go round together. That's it. Good long strokes."

Dr. Corrie was very much upon his dignity. What did Aunt Amelia mean by laughing at him ?

Before the great fiery circle of the sun had halved itself below the garden hedge Rachel had learnt the first simple glide on the ice. Her ankles felt less as though they had hinges on them, and confidence was growing. She ventured alone, with Uncle Will skating beside her, ready with a big hand in case of a slip, and looking down into that small, flushed face. "Yes, you're a pretty creature," he thought, "and a sweet tempered one. Some fellow will be lucky some day. Wonder if it will be Master George."

Grey mist was beginning to gather. Aunt Amelia and Mrs. Mary had gone back to the house, and Uncle Will relented towards George. After all, George had taken a toss, and so had his father.

"Now, then, all round together."

They formed a chain, with Uncle Will leading, and holding Rachel before him rather like the figure-head of a ship. George held on to Uncle Will, and Dr. Corrie wagged the tail. Uncle Joe, stumping across the paddock with the inevitable spud under his arm, stood on the bank and watched them, his brick-red face seeming to steam as his breath turned to vapour.

Dr. Corrie hailed him.

"Come on Joe. Can't spud thistles in this weather."

Uncle Joe grunted. He cut no figure on the ice, but he was the best judge of a bullock in all the Fen country.

“ Getting some of your weight off, Corrie.”

Why be personal ? Dr. Gregson was considering some retort, when his right skate caught a piece of cut-ice, and the procession lost its tail.

Uncle Joe chuckled. He too was of the opinion that Dr. Gregson could do with a toss or two.

CHAPTER 24

HERR OTTO SCHULTZE was in a dilemma. He could not hunt half a county for a lost child and hostage, nor was Lincolnshire London, where anything could happen, and your neighbour's house go up in flames without your knowing the names and the numbers of its occupants. He had been told that the Gregsons lived at Hastings, and there was not likely to be more than one Dr. Gregson in the place ; so Herr Schultze took the train for Hastings, and calling at a chemist's shop in Robertson Street, asked to be given Dr. Gregson's address. He could pose as an old patient, and pretending that he wished to write to the doctor for advice, obtain the Lincolnshire address.

A depressed assistant with a bad cold in the head, blew his nose, and disappointed Herr Otto.

“ Gregson. There id'nt do doctor of dat dae id Hastings.”

“ No Dr. Gregson ? ”

“ Do.”

Herr Schultze was angry, very angry. He entered a second chemists, and asked the same question, only to be given the same answer. Had other people been fooling him, that little urchin George ? Had not George told him that his

father practised at Hastings ? Herr Schultze lunched at the Queen's Hotel, and caught an afternoon train back to town, telling himself that he should have made sure of his man and his address by consulting the Medical Directory. Where could one obtain such a book ? At a library or at any West End club. Herr Schultze happened to be a temporary member of a semi-cosmopolitan club, a social honour that was unknown to his fellow clerks in the office of Miller & Co. Herr Schultze was treating Mr. Miller and his clerkship with complete casualness. He took a cab to the club, entered the reading-room, found his volume and looked up Dr. Corrie Gregson. The fellow lived at South end on Sea in Essex. Himmel, if only that brat had been there, Mr. Rose's yacht at the Burnham would have been very conveniently situated !

The German was both angry and worried. Time might be precious, and Otto Schultze was a Prussian who preferred the sabre and the bayonet to the casting of more subtle nets. Why bother about the Hyde brat when the business was becoming more urgent ? He was beginning to suspect that these English were not quite the fools they seemed. Would it not be better to appeal to headquarters, persuade old Uncle Fritz to make the final decision ? If there was to be

ruthlessness, and Schultze was prepared to be ruthless, let the head of the firm decide upon it.

Otto took a cab to Canonbury, and found Adolph Adler with his feet up in front of the fire, playing the flute. Adolph was in one of his romantic and dreamy moods when he could sentimentalize upon women and birds and flowers, and the little mother and the dear comrade, yet Adolph, in his pragmatistical moments, was a cruel little beast.

“ I want a telegram sending.”

“ Why not sent it ? ” said Adolph.

“ Because it is not good that I should be too much in evidence. Put that damned flute away and become a man.”

Adolph laughed.

“ Write, oh, maestro.”

Schultze sat down and scribbled his telegram on a sheet of paper. He pushed it at Adolph.

“ Don't send it from this neighbourhood. Some office further away.”

“ Good, oh, maistry. And the money ? ”

Schultze threw a sovereign on the table.

“ Up, march.”

Adolph departed. He did not mind being bullied by Otto, for the bully is the German hero, and Adolph admired

arrogance in a comrade, especially so when the relationship was more intimate and pathological. But Otto was a jealous and suspicious lover, and with Adolph out of the house he explored his friend's bedroom, opened drawers and cupboards, and dragged a trunk from under the bed. The trunk was locked, and it would neither be wise nor comradely to force the lock. Adolph's bandsman's tunic hung on a peg in the cupboard. Careless idiot to keep it there ! The thing should have been locked up in the trunk. Otto searched the pockets, and in an inner breast pocket found the photograph of a girl with braided hair and cow's eyes, standing with large hands folded over her stomach and staring stupidly yet with a little smirk at nothing in particular. Some beer-garden fräulein, Adolph's wench. Well, if Adolph liked that sort of thing ——

Schultze tucked the picture back into his pocket, and having discovered nothing in Adolph's room that could rouse his suspicions, closed the door, returned to the sitting-room, and spread himself before the fire. He stared at it with his flat blue eyes. Fire ! A fire consumed things, destroyed them, was ruthless, clean and final. Yes, Fire ! A slow, exultant luminosity spread over Otto Schultze's almost Mangol face, his two tiger-teeth showed.

Yes, why not fire ?

II

NOT till the next day did a reply reach Schultze from Germany. It exasperated him. Uncle Fritz had left for his villa on the Italian Riviera between Rapallo and Portofino. Schultze stormed about the room like some very angry hauptman in his regimental office after a rude lecture from his commanding officer.

“ The devil take it ! Why couldn't he have waited a day or two ? ”

Adolph, who was a late riser, sat eating sausages and bacon.

“ Why not go to Italy ? ”

“ Italy ! ”

“ Too many telegrams, big brother ! You would be there as quickly as a letter.”

Schultze stood in front of the fire, and crushed a lump of coal with the heel of his boot.

“ Yes, why not ? ” I must get full and final consent to

anything. You must watch. That fellow Schmidt is no good. Take Heinrich. And keep the band together."

"What about Rosenstein?"

"Tell him we may need his yacht. It would be a useful way of getting out of the country."

Schultze packed a portmanteau and caught the Rome Express. In those days the Riviera was not served by luxury trains, and the Rolls Royce, the Hispano Suiza, and the Daimler were yet to be evolved from the conceptions of such men as John Hyde. Golf-courses were unknown, though you could gamble at Monte-Carlo and Nice, and cultivate the exotic vices of the rich man and his parasites.

Schultze trained from Genoa to Rapallo, and at Rapallo he hired a vettura and drove along that halcyon road that ran beside a halcyon sea. Otto was a Wagnerian, for the noise and clangour and dramatic colour of such music was like a martial drum in his Teutonic belly. If he saw and felt the beauty of this Italian coast, blue silk seen through pines, the rocky cliffs, the almost opalescent sky, he saw it rather as country to be possessed and conquered. Why should a race of chattering monkeys call this gracious country theirs? Surely, it should be a German winter playground where big bellied Prussians could sun

themselves on the rocks, climb sweating up the hills, bellow like Assyrian bulls, and cram themselves with all the good things of the earth. Well, Uncle Fritz had made a beginning. He owned a miniature palace, five kilometers of sea-coast, pine woods, olive groves, vineyards. Some fifty of the Mediterranean monkeys toiled for him.

Before leaving England, Otto had sent a telegram to the Head of the Tribe. Uncle Fritz's estate was entered by a baronial gateway, and from it a road zig-zagged up the hill to where the great white house stood upon its terrace. That it was a monstrosity in super-wedding-cake architecture did not matter, or that it had replaced a beautiful old Italian country-house with old red pantiles and green jalousies ; it glared at you with its great, arrogant face ; it proclaimed the master-race ; it had cost much money. The winter sun was at full strength, and Uncle Fritz was snoring in a warm corner on the terrace, protected by glass screens, after a superb lunch. He was a vast old man with a stomach that rose like Golgotha, bearded, with a blotched red face. He cultivated the benign and patriarchal air of Germany's first modern Emperor, the sainted William.

Otto envied his uncle his siesta. He had slept

indifferently in the train, and fed yet more indifferently, but the cause of the Fatherland & Monopoly was paramount. He woke his uncle without compunction. The old man lay and blinked at him, hands resting on his mountainous belly.

“ So, you are here.”

“ I am here, and I am hungry.”

Uncle Fritz smiled like a big, toothless baby.

“ Call Luigi. He can serve you something.”

Luigi was shouted for by the master-voice, and having heard his Hector, waddled off to produce food for him. Herr Otto was not popular with servants. His voice was the toe of a boot.

“ Well, my child, how is England ? ”

“ Fog,” said Otto, “ nothing but fog and bad beer.”

“ Ach, so, and the news too ? ”

“ Like the beer.”

Otto sat down in the sunlight, and looked at the sea. The tops of a row of cypresses cut athwart it like the teeth of a giant saw. A yacht on such a sea would be very pleasant, or to lie and bask on the rocks with your Ganymede beside you. His uncle's shrewd old eyes, that could look so innocent, observed that hard young face.

“ What is wrong with the beer, my child ? ”

“ That fool Schmidt blundered. We lost the brat.”

“ Such a good chattel to bargain with. Well, what next ? ”

“ We tried getting into the house, but were interfered with. I have a feeling that the fellow is near the end of his job.”

“ So, the matter is urgent ? ”

“ Himmel, yes.”

“ Yes, I will tell you.”

They were interrupted by Luigi with a lunch tray. On it stood a bottle of Chianti, and Schultze glared at the bottle.

“ You bring me that stuff ! ”

“ It is very old, signore.”

“ Take it away, you monkey. Hock.”

“ Yes, signor.”

Luigi placed the tray on a table before Herr Schultze, removed the chianti, and toddled off for the German wine. How he hated that young man ! How he would like, on some dark night, to stick a knife into his belly ! Uncle Fritz, lying tranquilly, with his hands on his stomach, smiled at the sky.

“ Well, what is it to be done ? ”

Otto, eating savagely, talked with his mouth full. He was completely frank with his uncle. Ruthlessness was the thing. Hyde and his invention and all his papers needed eliminating. How was it to be done ? Otto was explaining, when Luigi returned with the Hock.

“ Pour it out, and get out.”

Luigi did both.

“ Now,” said his uncle, “ proceed. Ribbentrop is getting good results and we don’t want him forestalled.”

The old man lay and listened tranquilly to Schultze’s quite damnable proposition. Yes, no doubt it was drastic, but you could not make war without blood. Had not the great Chancellor forged Germany into a land of iron ? Uncle Fritz might have been listening to some gentle discourse upon the immortality of man. His face remained serene.

“ It is good philosophy, my child. And when and if it is completed, what happens to you and the rest ? ”

“ We have Rosenstein’s yacht.”

“ Does he know ? ”

“ He will take care not to know. We shall do the work at night, and by the morning we shall be at Burnham and at sea.”

“ It sounds good, very good, Otto.”

“ Then, you consent ? ”

Uncle Fritz smiled at the sky.

“ Yes. Such discoveries must not be lost to the Fatherland. But I shall know nothing.”

Schultze laughed, and tore another roll in half.

“ Sacrifice to the Fatherland ! That is good.”

III

THE HYDES decided that it was not necessary to warn the Gregsons of the indiscretions of Charlotte, but when Mr. Clapp called at No. 7 Aylwin Terrace to explore the situation and to invite Herr Schultze to a musical evening, he was told by the landlady that Herr Schultze was not at home.

“ Not at home ! Has he left ? You see, I wished to ask him to supper.”

“ No, sir ; just gone away for a few days. Mr. Alder is in.”

“ Oh, Mr. Adler is in. I think I would like to see him and leave a message.”

Mr. Clapp had not the slightest idea who Herr Adler was, but Otto Schultze's absence did concern him. Was the fellow down in Lincolnshire hunting for Babes in The Wood ? The landlady took him upstairs, knocking at the door, threw it open.

" A gentleman who wanted to see Mr. Schultze."

Adolph was busy in front of the fire, examining a collection of indecent photographs which he had brought in a shabby shop in Hollywell Street. He scrabbled them together, pushed them down beside the cushion of his chair, and got up, smiling like a cherub.

Mr. Clapp explained and introduced himself.

" I came to see Herr Schultze. He has enjoyed music with us. I was going to ask him to supper next week, but I hear he is away."

" That is so," said Adolph, who recognized Mr. Clapp.

" Will he be away long ? "

" I cannot say."

" I am sorry. I'm afraid I must leave the invitation till later."

" I am afraid so, Herr Clapp."

Mr. Clapp had not missed Herr Adler's surreptitious smuggling away of papers, and it occurred to him that if

had chosen to exert force he might have discovered something of interest and significance tucked in beside that cushion, but violence would have given his game away. Adolph's cherubic face continued to express bland innocence. Yes, Mr. Clapp had seen the fellow before, but where ? Hanging about Sussex Terrace ?

" I am sorry to have missed Herr Schultze. Perhaps you will tell him I called."

" Oh, certainly."

Adolph spoke very good English, and his air of innocence was too perfect.

" Thank you. Herr Schultze has a fine voice. He sings Schubert's songs exquisitely."

Adolph was on his feet now. He bowed politely.

" I will deliver your message, Mr. Clapp."

" Thank you so much," and Mr. Clapp left him to resume his studies in pornography.

In Mr. Clapp's opinion the absence of Schultze altered the situation. The Hydes should be warned, and once again Mr. Clapp found himself on that romantic doorstep, feeling like a boy, who, when asked to tea, had upset his cup over his hostess's best tablecloth. Who would open the door, she whom he both loved and feared ? Strange that so lovely a

passion should make a blundering ass of you ! Footsteps crossed the hall. He heard bolts drawn and a lock turned. So, John Hyde was giving no hostages to fate.

It was Hyde who stood there, a civic Hyde, complete with frock coat and morning trousers.

“ Hallo, Clapp.”

“ Can I have a word with you, my dear fellow ? ”

“ Come in. I have five minutes. Due at my agents for a conference.”

Hyde relocked the door, and took Josiah Wedgewood into the dining room. Mr. Clapp noticed that a more adequate fire was burning in the grate. Uncle James had seen the light, and written his nephew a cheque for a hundred pounds.

“ Anything serious ? ”

“ Schultze has disappeared.”

“ Damn the fellow ! Do you know —— ? ”

“ Just gone away, that is all I know. I thought you might like to warn the Gregsons.”

Hyde appeared to take the news less seriously than Mr. Clapp, possibly because his affairs were going so well at the moment that he felt like a man who had scaled a mountain and fooled his enemies, leaving them and his

hazards lost in the dark alley. After all, what could these Germans do ? His work was complete, and the results were in the hands of the ablest agents in the country. Wise was certain of obtaining a patent, in fact the patenting of the Hyde I.C. Engine etc. was only a question of days. John Hyde was a little *tête montée* ? He felt himself at the beginning of that long dreamed of and most notable career when he would join the band of historic explorers, Watt, Stevenson, Arkwright, Edison. The name of Hyde might become an international symbol, and he a master of power and of wealth. Had they not been a little too alarmist about this affair ? The Germans might be a ruthless race, but they were shrewd, and these rivals of his were men of the world. Was it credible that Bergman, Schultze & Co. should attempt the abduction of a child from Lincolnshire farm ?

“ Do you think we need worry, Clapp ? ”

“ Well, I thought you ought to know.”

“ Very good of you. I'll talk it over with my wife. If she wants the Gregsons warned, we'll write to them.”

CHAPTER 25

MR. CLAPP had gone without seeing his fair lady, a Mr. Clapp who could not decide which anguish was the more poignant, that of seeing that which you desired and could not claim, or that of not seeing it. Moreover, Mr. Clapp had seen John Hyde in a frock-coat and morning trousers, and somehow subtly changed. Had there not been a faint flavour of patronage in Hyde's attitude towards him ? Had not Hyde suddenly put on stature, and become in prospect a very potent person, a man of world-wide wealth and reputation ? Plumage ! Even the beginnings of success, like fiery wine, went to some mens' heads. And what was he, in Hyde's estimation, but a rather obscure schoolmaster, fat and baldish and blundering, a fellow to whom you might give playful tolerance and one finger ?

Mr. Clapp had no illusions about mirrors. He could remember as a shy and sensitive youth trying to dress himself up to the part he dreamed of playing and his mirror had shattered its impressiveness. A great, lumping oaf of a fellow ! Why did providence dress up a romantic and poetic soul in such unillustrious flesh ?

Hyde called up the stairs.

“ Nan, one moment.”

She came running down to him.

“ Oh, Nan, Behemoth has just been in with a load of scare news. The man’s rather an ass, but a good ass.”

She did not smile with him. Her infinite seriousness was a veil for other divinations. It was possible that she too had glimpses of the new man in her husband. She had known him in frustration and poverty, but not in success. Success made some men arrogant, but arrogance was such a betrayal of fibre, so sinister in its implications. There was a self in her that gazed and wondered and was troubled.

“ Is he quite that, John ? ”

Hyde laughed.

“ Well, you’re prejudiced. The poor fellow looks at you with calf’s eyes.”

She shivered inwardly.

“ Don’t, John. He’s rather a big child, like George.”

“ The infantile mind is a large body. No, that’s rather priggish. He’s a good creature. He came to tell us that the Schultze fellow has disappeared. He thought we ought to warn the Gregsons.”

She looked frightened.

“ Well, oughtn’t we to ? ”

“ Hardly necessary. I can’t see a German aristo going down into Lincolnshire and routing out Rachel.”

“ Are you so sure ? Remember —— ”

“ Oh, well, if you like, write to Mary. They can get their shot-guns ready.”

He glanced at the clock.

“ Must be going. The cab should be at Uncle Jim’s door. Have Maria in if you feel nervous.”

“ No.”

“ After all, this hide and seek business is nearly an end. That’s almost a family motto, Hyde & Seek ! Goodbye, my dear.”

He kissed her rather casually, and went to the door. A new hat and overcoat and gloves waited for him on the hat-stand. She helped him on with his coat. These new clothes, plumage, had they an ulterior significance ? She locked and bolted the door after him, and went upstairs to write her letter. But she found it difficult to concentrate. Her intuitions seemed to go drifting off and weaving questions against the grey sky. If success and wealth were to come to them, how would this comrade of hers react ? She wondered. But was there not disloyalty in such wondering ?

She wrote:

My Dear Mrs. Gregson,

After all your kindness, it seems
graceless to worry you.

Her concentration faded, or rather, it turned its light upon a hypothetical future. Poor John, he had suffered to many frustrations, so many hot shames, and he had born them with that ironic head of his cocked defiantly at fate. Was it surprising that he desired a Roman Triumph, a passionate progress above the heads of a world that had ignored or belittled him? He must have his festa if festa there was to be. She could share of it with him, forgive him many things. But would he wish her to share it with her? Was he one of those men, who, in the conquest of material things, lose their souls in the pursuit of power and strong women? Could she forgive him that? She gave a little shiver, and struggled back to her letter.

She wrote:

Certain persons have found out that
Rachel has left us, and is with you in
Lincolnshire.

What is more, the principal actor has
disappeared. I think it is right to warn
you, though John scoffs at the idea that this
person might be in Lincolnshire.

If you think the responsibility is too great, one of us will come and fetch Rachel.

Her letter makes us realise how good you have all been to her. Sometimes one is a little afraid when things go too well.

I shall never be able to thank for all your kindness.

Give my love to George.

Rachel gained five pounds in weight !
That, almost accuses me of parsimony !

Thank you both and all those kind people, so very much. Some day I hope to meet Aunt Amelia, Uncle Will & Uncle Joe.

Ever yours gratefully,

Ann Hyde

There was a pillar-box in the Painswick Road, but when she looked in the drawer for a stamp, she remembered that they had run out of stamps. Oh, bother ! So far as she knew the nearest post-office was in the Essex Road. Well, she could appeal to Maria, and borrow from Uncle James, and ascending to the top-floor she tried the secret door, only

to find that John had locked it and taken the key. Again, oh bother ! Rather thoughtless of him, but then, he was the man, Pheobus up in the sky, and driving his dream-chariot. To all intents and purposes she was alone in the house, and cut off from Maria. Should she go round to Uncle James' door and ask Maria to post the letter ? Maria could join her in No. 1 when she returned. But that would leave Rye House empty, and its alternative access to John's holy of holies unguarded. Then she thought of Mr. Clapp. Why not ring the bell of No. 2, and ask him to post her letter for her ?

Charlotte was out shopping, and a depressed Mr. Clapp had taken refuge in The Rookery, and was solacing himself with Schubert's songs. He had felt rebuffed by Hyde ; the fellow had treated him like a nervous child who had come running in with some booby tale. Mr. Clapp, rolling to and fro on the music-stool, and giving voice to the frustrations of a romantic soul, did not hear the front bell ring, nor did he hear Ellen come to the Rookery door. She opened it without ceremony, and threw her bomb into the dingy little room.

“ That lady from next door wants to speak to you, sir.”

“ What ? ”

“ The lady from next door.”

Mr. Clapp's large person seemed to bounce from the stool like a child's balloon that has hit the floor and rebounded.

“ Did you ask her in ? ”

“ Yessir, but she wouldn't come in.”

“ Right, Ellen, I'll see to it.”

Ellen had left the front-door open, and Mr. Clapp saw Ann Hyde standing on the lower step as though watching the street. She had something white in her hand. Mr. Clapp not conscious of treading on solid floorboards ; floating clouds might have been under his feet, and when he spoke his voice seemed to sing.

“ Won't you come in ? It's cold there.”

She gave him a sudden smile.

“ The house is empty for a moment.”

“ Oh, I see.”

“ I wondered whether you could post this letter for me ? I'm out of stamps, and I don't want to leave the house.”

“ Of course. With the greatest pleasure. But are you all alone ? ”

“ Yes, I am leaving Maria next door.”

He held out his hand for the letter but his eyes looked

into her eyes.

“ I don’t think you ought to be alone. How long will —— ? ”

“ I don’t quite know. There is an important conference.”

“ Well, go back to the fire. I’ll hurry along and post this, and then see that no one calls.”

Her eyelids flickered. Jack might laugh at this large creature, but somehow she could not join in the laughter, nor did she desire it. Such women as Ann Hyde are quick in divining the inherent generosities and self negations of the better sort of men, the lovely boyishness that lingered, and was neither exquisitely decadent nor frankly brutal.

“ You are very good to us.”

“ Dear lady,” and he fumbled at the words, “ well, some things are not difficult. Excuse me, but the letter is urgent.”

He had not glanced at the address.

“ Yes, it’s to Mrs. Gregson about those people and Rachel.”

“ I’m glad you have written. It shall go at once.”

He was off the step when she called him back.

“ Oh, it wants stamping. I shall owe you a penny.”

He turned and laughed like a dog whose mistress has

given him something to carry.

“ I’ll send in a bill for services rendered ! No, allow me the penny.”

“ I will.”

Mr. Clapp went swinging off to post her letter, and Schubert was vocal in him and more exultantly so. “ Hark, hark, the lark ! ” His movements had a jocund, rolling extravagance. There was music in the air. He had broken her vase, and she had given him a letter to post, and her smile. Mr. Clapp did break into song as he walked down Astey’s Row, and two voluble and vulgar women who were talking into each other’s flat faces, turned their heads to watch him, and splurged into sniggers. Mr. Clapp did not hear them. He was floating far away and above such urban garbage, with Shelley & Keats, and that tremendous fellow Browning. Mr. Clapp had a particular feeling for the great Robert, divining in him another soul that had much to say, and found the saying of it sometimes inarticulate torture. Yes, how the blind immortal in you strained at the leash of language ! Words, words ! Was it the Blavatsky woman who had said that that which could not be expressed in words was untrue, and that which could not be expressed — true. Well, nonsense of course, but sometimes the charlatans who

talked visionary mumbo-jumbo did get near the truth, or filched some other fellow's vision. Nonsense ! There was not enough lovely nonsense in the world.

Mr. Clapp bought his penny stamp, licked it, and attached it to her letter. Almost it was like a caress. Her handwriting was not so stereotyped as the average feminine Victorian hand, the product of Establishments for Young Gentlewomen.

Mrs. Corrie Gregson,
Chantry Farm
Holbeach Hurn
Holbeach, Linconshire.

Mary Gregson ! There was another rather lovely person, and the mother of George. Chantry Farm. What rich, old English flavour there was in that. Holbeach ! Sea beach, or beech tree, Saxon bok. Hollow beech ? But was the Fen country beech country ? Hardly. Popular, willow, and thorn, great black poplars, Lombardies, or the lovely silver throated abele.

Mr. Clapp came back humming up Astey's Row, and the two hags were still gobbling in each other's faces. Mr. Clapp simply did not see them, and that is the blessedness of loving beauty. Ugly things may be no more than toads

under a stone. Had anything happened ; was she in danger ? Mr. Clapp billowed towards the door. Had the great moment arrived when he could show his metal, play the devastating hero, and crash his fist into some scoundrel's face ? He heard bolts withdrawn and the key turned and he was trembling to take the stage.

“ Is anything wrong ? ”

She smiled at him.

“ No, only that I fear you will catch a dreadful cold.”

Mr. Clapp felt utterly deflated. His big hands went limp.

“ Oh, I'm quite warm, I assure you.”

She had seen his poor face fall.

“ Why not come in and sit by the fire, and talk to me ?

John can't be long now.”

“ Dear lady, I should intrude.”

“ Do friends in need intrude ? ”

“ That is very sweet of you. If I may I'll trespass for five minutes.”

A sudden merry and mischievous gaiety seemed to tremble in her. She was the girl humouring the devoted boy.

“ It's so sensitive a carpet.”

“ What, dear lady ? ”

“ The carpet of convention. I do not think that you and I

are so barbaric that we need —— ”

Mr. Clapp took off his hat like a knight unhelmeting.

“ Ich dien. Forgive me, that’s German, or use to be. Yes, I’ll come in and sit by the fire.”

It was a sacred fire, but he did not say so.

II

THE strangest thing of all was that in a little while she was talking to him as to a father confessor, a priestly yet paternal person who sat unseen behind a grill in the soothing silence of some great church. But Mr. Clapp was not unseen. Her liquid, brown eyes were steadfastly on him. There was a tranquillity about her ; she did not fidget or pose or betray herself in restless gestures. Mr. Clapp had been persuaded to smoke a pipe. He was full to the brim with a secret and exultant wonder. Was she really talking to him like this about life and its particular problems, as to a friend whose wisdom and integrity were accepted as final ? There was no coquetry here. She would not have been so poignant to him had there been coquetry. A friend. Was their disillusionment in her calmness ? Maybe her candour should have saddened him, in that it

suggested that the man in him did not disturb the woman in her, but this middle aged schoolmaster had other sanctities to satisfy him.

Success ! What of success, the splendour and the spaciousness of it when it came too suddenly ? A man or woman who had been starved might gorge himself on forbidden fruit ! She did not speak disloyally, or of any other person than herself, but the pretence did not deceive her confessor.

“ Have you ever been afraid of wealth ? ”

Mr. Clapp seemed to find humour in the question.

“ Dear lady, the opportunity to experiment has been denied me ! But why should —— ? Doesn't it depend ? ”

“ I'm so afraid of my baser self.”

There was humour too in this, lovely humour.

“ Is there such a self ? ”

“ Oh, yes, in all of us, however much we pretend. Even our good devout parents could not educate us out of the heritage of original sin.”

She laughed, but gently so, and Mr. Clapp laughed with her.

“ Old souls, and young souls. There are other values that can't be corroded by vanity. But have you any vanity ? ”

She gave a little shrug of the shoulders.

“ Of course. Is there anyone —— ? ”

“ The dose varies. And can't wealth give one spaciousness and peace ? I sometimes dream.”

“ Of differences ? ”

“ Need one be different. Let us say one has a Strad. To play on instead of some cheap raw instrument.”

Her eyes were turned to the fire, one hand laid along her cheek.

“ Poverty one knows, but wealth, no. If John's invention grows as he thinks, we may be —— ”

“ Your husband is no boy.”

“ Isn't there a boy in every man ? Not like George, but in that raw phase. You must know.”

Mr. Clapp looked bothered. He pulled at his pipe. Of course he knew. That lout phase, turgid with sex. You had to grow through it or out of it, and some men never did.

“ It needn't last. The craftsman and the artist come out top. If I had six months of luxury, I think my stomach would turn against it.”

“ To what ? ”

“ The painting of pictures, music, lovely country.”

She sat considering his philosophy.

“ You think a man’s craft is supreme ? ”

“ If it is the real craft. What one has done for years,
with passion and patience, one goes on doing.”

She turned to him with a sudden sheen of the eyes.

“ What sweet sanity is yours ! Thank you. I will remember
those words.”

CHAPTER 26

HERR SCHULTZE returned through Switzerland by way of Basel, and staying for the night at that famous hostelry "Les Trois Rois ", he heard the Rhine flowing under his window. That was a German river, a Niebelung river, singing of heroes and of bold blonde women, Kings and swordplay, love and splendour. Herr Schultze was one of those who were beginning to speak of a future when all the Rhine should be German from source to the North Sea. The Swiss and the Dutch would belong to the German Reich, France be a vassal state, Italy a Teutonic playground. The piratical English would be driven from the seas.

Herr Schultze dined well, and slept well, with the tawny winter river liquid Wagner beneath his window. Switzerland was under snow, Christmas snow, and so was Germany. Herr Schultze, in a first class compartment, with a foot-warmer under his feet, saw the Black Forest swarthy and splendid piled upon its hills above white valleys. Here were vineyards asleep under their white quilts. But the country to which Herr Schultz was bound had another sort of blackness, of coal and machines and smoking chimneys. It had no natural beauty, but the beauty of iron,

of the modern German sword being reforged for other conquests. Steel, guns, shells. The new Niebelungs were not flowery folk.

Schultze's visit to headquarters was formally informal. He spent the night at Uncle Fritz's country mansion, where the industrial scheme was kept at a distance by a stone walled park. He was waited upon by sedulous and suave servants. Here Otto Schultze was very much a person. Uncle Fritz's carriage waited next morning to drive him to the Works, acres and acres of efficient ugliness. Schultze's business was with Herr Black, a chemical expert, and Herr Black consulted together. Herr Black was like his name. His hair stood up *en brosse*; he wore high powered spectacles; his neck was as thick as his square head, and was shaped like a billet of wood. His face was both mild and brutal, with a scar across the right cheek. For some particular reason he stank of iodoform.

Schultze explained his need, a particular product, concentrated and easily carried. Could Herr Black produce such a substance? No, not an explosive, but a substance that was fiercely inflammable. Herr Black could.

"Ach, so my dear baron. I have it locked in my private

safe. Experimental, yes, but I have tested it most thoroughly."

"How much would be needed to set a house a'light?"

Herr Black blinked.

"Half a kilo or so."

"Is it dangerous to carry?"

"No. A nice little brown paper parcel would suffice. So easily carried, so inconspicuous."

Schultze grinned.

"How valuable is the expert and his knowledge! But you will know nothing."

"I shall know nothing."

"You are a very valuable person, Black. I was discussing with my uncle the raising of your salary."

Herr Black bowed in his chair.

"I deeply appreciate your good opinion, baron."

Herr Schultze travelled towards Holland with the parcel in his handbag. It was a lightish parcel containing a cardboard box full of gray powder, and the box was labelled "Tooth Powder". Passports were not needed in those more placid days, and the Dutch custom officials, when Herr Schultze presented his card, smiled upon him and were politely incurious. Herr Schultze's actual name

carried great weight in Holland, for were not representatives of the famous firm continually passing to and fro. At Harwich the English custom-house might not have existed. Schultze had been sick on the Flushing-Harwich boat, an unseemly experience for so arrogant a person, and suggesting that the fool-islanders might yet continue to rule the sea.

He arrived in London, still feeling cold and yellow, to find the city enveloped in a pea-soup fog. Horrible place ! Herr Schultze took a cab, and as it crawled towards Canonbury he was moved to remember that Italian sea, and Uncle Fritz's sunny terrace, the cypresses and the olive groves. Yes, Italy was surely a predestined playground for the dominant race. Italy was created for service, even as Paris was the paradise of pimps, whores and waiters.

There was less fog at Canonbury. Schultze paid his cabman the exact fare, and added no tip, and the man was rude to him.

"What about my tip, gov'nor ?"

Schultze ignored him, and turned to the iron gate.

"Garn, you bloody pauper. Ain't got a sixpence left on you, I suppose."

"Swine dog," said Schultze, and slammed the gate.

The cabbie was neither so old nor so un-English as to swallow the insult without action. He was off his box, and opening the iron gate, as the German reached the top of the steps.

“ Swine dog am I, you bloody furriner ! Put your dirty fists up.”

Herr Schultze turned to stare. He was incurably Prussian, in that he assumed that all common people could be bullied and kicked as a German recruit was bullied and kicked, and this lewd fellow's audacity surprised him. He had the door open, and had deposited portmanteau and handbag in the hall, but the cabbie was on the steps, and meaning business. Schultze lifted a foot and aimed a kick at him. It might have caught the cockney's chin, but he dodged it, seized Herr Schultze's leg, and gave a heave to it. The German's other foot slid, and he came down with a crash, hitting the back of his head on the doorstep. It was a veritable knockout, and the cabbie, reverting to discretion, made a dash for his box, and drove off with whip and expedition.

Herr Schultze's landlady, who had heard the altercation, and come to the half-basement window to see what was happening, hurried up the stairs, to find her lodger lying

with his head on the doormat between a handbag and portmanteau. Schultze was unconscious, and looking like an innocent boy, with his fair hair over his face. Mrs. Harper, shocked and frightened, waddled to the foot of the stairs and called Herr Adolph. Herr Adolph was playing the flute, and had not heard the unseemly row.

“ Oh, sir, come quick, sir. There’s been an accident.”

Adolph did not hear her, and she bundled up the stairs and opened the door.

“ Do come, sir. Herr Schultze has had an accident.”

“ What ? ”

“ He had a quarrel with the cabman, and the dreadful man must have knocked him down. I think he’s hit his head.”

Adolph rushed out of the room and down the stairs. His friend’s hat was lying in the middle of the passage, and Adolph stepped round it, and bent over Schultze.

Schultze’s eyes were open. He was dazed, bewildered, and still the innocent, blond boy.

“ Otto, what happened ? ”

Schultze’s own self was back in him. His face lost its youthfulness and became harsh and cruel. He sat up.

“ Where’s that damned swine of a cabman ? ”

“ Gone.”

“ Shut the door, you fool. We don’t want publicity.”

“ I can’t, while you are there.”

Schultze scrambled out of the way, feeling the back of his head. He glanced at the precious bag. Adolph closed the door. He helped his friend up, and Schultze leaned against the wall. He was feeling dizzy. He looked at his hand to see if there was any blood on it, and Adolph, who had been scared, was not wholly displeased by his friend’s downfall. Otto had been developing too much arrogance and authority.

“ Head aching ? ”

Schultze glared at him.

“ I hit my head on that damned step. You might carry those things upstairs. Put them in my room.”

“ You look a bit starved.”

“ I had a most foul crossing.”

“ Hungry ? ”

“ I was. I’ll lie down for half an hour.”

“ What you need,” said Adolph, “ is a good dose of schnapps. I’ve got some in my flask. Can you manage the stairs ? ”

“ Yes. Be careful of that bag. I’ll lock it up.”

“ Hard cash ? ”

“ More important than that.”

Schultze took his hat from Adolph, and climbed the stairs, holding on to the rail. He still was feeling the effects of the blow ; it seemed to have brought back the nausea of the Flushing-Harwich crossing. The sitting room with its fire was preferable to the cold, lodging-house bedroom, and Schultze turned the sofa in front of the fire, and lay down on it. He kept his overcoat on, for he was feeling cold and sick.

Adolph carried the luggage into his friend's bedroom. He tried to open the bag, but it was locked, and his curiosity remained unsatisfied. Now, what the devil was in that bag ? He pushed it under the bed, crossed to his own room, and took a flask out of a top drawer. He had a swig at it before taking it to his friend.

“ Have a pull at that, Otto. What was the trouble with the cabbie ? ”

Schultze put the flask to his lips, took a mouthful of the neat spirit, and felt the warmth of it in his stomach.

“ That fellow was insolent, and I called him a swine dog.”

“ Rather tactless of you, surely ? Tempting publicity ! ”

“ Shut up. I don't feel like irony.”

“ These English are stubborn beasts. You whack 'em across

the backside and they turn and toss you. Have another drink."

This, too, was irony, for Schultze was intending to empty the flask.

"Someday we'll have these English on the barrack square and teach them discipline."

"Discipline, my dear fellow ! That means getting your own way at the expense of everybody and everything. That fat gentleman called while you were over there."

"Clapp ?"

"Yes."

"What did he want ?"

"To ask you to supper."

Schultze turned the flask upside down, and finding it empty, tossed it to Adolph.

"Great fat fool. Has a wife like a yellow canary. What did you tell him ?"

"Nothing. Only that you were away."

"I had better go and call on the fellow. He strikes me as being rather too inquisitive. Tomorrow or the next day maybe Der Tag. No observers needed. It would be a good idea to ask him to supper here and make him drunk."

Adolph stood leaning against the mantelpiece. His

glance was oblique and narrow. He was wondering what was in that bag, and in what desperate adventure he was expected to share. Adolph was a Bavarian from Munich, and though Wagner might sound splendid and intoxicating in the musical shrine by the river, Wagner transposed into modern measure could sound ominous and frightening. Adolph the sentimentalist, leaning against the mantle piece and observing his friend's grim face, was moved to think of the Bavarian lakes, flowery meadows in June, and the beer-gardens, and plump blonde girls. Death might be all very well on the stage, and set to music, but Adolph was no Siegfried. He was worried. What was in Schultze's Prussian mind ?

“ So, there is a plan ? ”

The colour was coming back to Schultze's face. He lay and looked at the fire. The light gave to his face a hard, polished sheen.

“ There is. Finality, my lad.”

“ Am I to be honoured —— ? ”

Schultze raised his ice-blue eyes to his friend's face.

“ Certainly. You will be in charge of the Band.”

“ Oh, the Band ! Slow music ! ”

“ Yes. You will isolate the house, and block that passage

at the back, while Heinrich picks the lock of the garden door or forces a window."

" And then ? "

" I go in with my nice little box of Greek Fire, and light a sacrifice to the Fatherland."

" Set the house on fire ? "

" Quite so."

" And what of the people in it ? "

" Sacrificial victims, my child. We want that fellow Hyde removed. He can invent new haloes or fiery chariots in heaven."

Adolph was scared.

" But, damn it, all this is terribly dangerous ! What happens to us ? "

" We disappear."

" And how ? "

" A night train down into Essex. We travel in twos and threes. Rosenstein's yacht will be ready. And while the English police are still raking the ashes and scratching their heads we shall be in Germany."

UNCLE WILL was a great man for his siesta. Chantry Farm rose at some primaeval hour, breakfasted at seven, took hot milk and cheesecakes at eleven, and dined at half past twelve. From one fifteen to three Uncle Will slept in summer in a hammock slung under four young elms whose foliage made a complete and shady canopy ; in winter he spread himself in a cane chair in the greenhouse. Under the trees or amid his winter plants he was at peace, and secure from the various noises of that very active house. To be disturbed during his sleep was the one thing that produced in Uncle Will a gruff peevishness. Even George had been educated into respecting the sanctity of this somnolent hour.

“ Uncle Will must not be disturbed.”

All the house knew it ; Rachel knew it, and so did Rachel's mother.

Ann Hyde's letter had reached her by the early post, when Dr. Gregson was deep in bacon and eggs. Mary had read it, and then slipped it into her lap. Her husband was helping himself to a great slice of farmhouse butter, and adding to it a dollop of raspberry jam. Mary Gregson had glanced at Corrie consideringly. Should she show him that letter ? There were occasions when the sceptic and the mocker in

Dr. Corrie discouraged her, for when a situation or a problem promised to be a nuisance he would shrug it off with the air of superior and playful wisdom that marked the man of the world. He had said to her early in their married life " My dear, try and keep domestic worries to yourself. My patients give me a sufficiency of that. When I come home it is to eat what the cook has cooked, and not to be fed on the misdeeds or stupidities of the vulgar." Dr. Corrie could phrase a point quite well ; he was an exacting person, and the peculiar thing about life is that the charmingly exacting people receive most devotion and care.

No, she would rather appeal to Uncle Will, and ask him to sit in judgement on the matter, for Uncle Will was more than a man of the world ; he was a country sage and philosopher. But Uncle Will spent the whole morning skating with the children, and after dinner he went to take his rest. Mary Gregson waited.

The children were again on the ice. Dr. Corrie had taken the cob and ridden into Holbeach to buy tobacco. Mary waited until the grandfather clock in the hall struck three before going out into the garden to lay her letter before Uncle Will. Uncle Will knew of the Hyde problem.

The grass was still silver grey with frost. A group of cypresses, very black against the winter sky, hid the greenhouse from the windows. It was a kind of sacred grove spiring up protectively about Uncle Will's retreat, and screening the gross utility of glass from spoiling Uncle Will's garden vista. A glasshouse was not an object of beauty, though it might contain loveliness within.

Mary came to the door. Beside it a large barrel was sunk in the ground, and half covered with ivy, a dark and mysterious mirror fascinating to children. Mary called it Uncle Will's magic well, and every morning its waters were troubled by the old man's watering-cans which filled and put to warm in the greenhouse. Uncle Will was awake, and enjoying those moments of meditation that are pleasant to the old after peaceful sleep.

" May I come in, Uncle ? "

His very blue eyes twinkled at her.

" May you come in ! Corrie back yet ? "

" No."

She was holding the door ajar and she slipped in and closed it quickly to preserve the heat.

" I want you to read a letter, uncle."

" With pleasure, my dear."

His spectacles and the daily paper lay on the staging beside him, and he put on his glasses, and took the letter from her. There was a cushion on the staging, and she posed herself there.

“ It’s about Rachel, and those German people.”

“ Have you shown it to Corrie ? ”

“ Corrie makes such a joke of things. I have a feeling that all this is serious.”

Uncle Will read the letter through. There were quite a number of people in the village who could neither read nor write ; they came to Uncle Will on those rare occasions when a letter arrived or one had to be written ; they preferred Uncle Will’s broad humanism to the pomposities of the parson.

“ Worried about it, Mary ? ”

“ Well, yes, one feels rather responsible.”

Uncle Will gave her one of his deliberate smiles.

“ Yes, other peoples burdens. But do you think a confounded German would come all the way down here, into the wilds, where every stranger is under suspicion, to try and kidnap a child ? ”

“ It does sound rather fantastic.”

“ I should say that Rachel is as safe here as in the tower

of London."

" You don't mind keeping her ? "

Uncle Will removed his glasses, got up, and patted Mary Gregson's head.

" Don't you worry. I'll keep two cartridges in my gun, and if we have any visitors they'll get it in the legs. Where are the children now ? "

" On the ice."

" I'll keep an eye on them."

" Do you think there is any need to tell Corrie ? "

" None at all," said Uncle Will, " I'm handier with a gun than Corrie is."

CHAPTER 27

THE HYDES were giving a luncheon party at No. 1 Sussex Terrace, or rather, it was Uncle James' party, in that he was its secret sponsor and its paymaster. Mr. Leonard Wise and his partner were to meet Sir Christopher Steel of the Coventry firm of Steel & Allgood ; in brief it was to be Sir Christopher Steel's introduction to the Hyde Internal Combustion Engine and its creator. Uncle James was a believer in the prestige ; not only did money talk, but it threw a glamour over financial adventures, and made bargaining more dignified and convincing.

“ Never let one of these fellows think, my lad, that you are short of cash. They'll try and exploit you if you haven't a face of brass.”

Adolph Adler, idling up and down the Painswick Road, and keeping a carefully casual eye on Sussex Terrace, saw a caterer's van turn in and pull up outside the Hyde house, and deposit two men and three large baskets. Maria, loaned for the day, opened the door to the chef and the waiter. Adolph, who was feeling the cold and who wore a muffler over his chin, groped inside his overcoat for his watch. The hour was eleven o'clock. He watched the van drive

away, and the black lettering on its green body revealed to him its significance, "Messrs. Perks & Lovibond, Caterers & Confectioners." So, the Hydcs were giving a party. Adolph put his watch away. This idling up and down in a bitter northeast wind seemed to emphasise his dislike of this most sinister adventure. It was not compromise that moved him, but the lure of a sentimentalist and a flâneur for his own most precious skin. It was all very well for Otto to boast about his duty to the Fatherland, but Otto was a person who would profit very considerably by the elimination of Messrs. Hyde & Co. Adolph shivered. He was the victim of two irreconcilable fears. He was very much in the power of Bergman & Co, and if he shirked one hazard, the other would remain to threaten him. Well, if No. 1 Sussex Terrace was celebrating some social occasion, it would not materialise until one o'clock. Meanwhile, he could go back and report to Schultze, and sit by the fire.

Otto was just out of bed, and peevish. Adolph too was suffering from one of those revulsions which stain the romantic colour-sense with "Greenery-Yallery" after some emotional debauch. Otto was in his nightshirt, and shaving; his naked feet had a raw unseemliness as he scraped at his chin.

“What, back here? I told you to watch the place.”

Adolph looked pinched with cold and sudden fastidious nausea.

“It is that freezing wind.”

“You never did outpost duty in the snow outside Paris.”

“This isn’t Paris. I’d like to be in Paris. Those people won’t run away. They are giving a party.”

Schultze lowered the razor, and gave Otto one of his wolf looks.

“The devil they are! Now, I wonder? I want to know who goes into that house.”

“Does it matter?”

“Matter! I should say it does, sheephead. They may be celebrating something. If so, it may make our intervention more urgent.”

He resumed his shaving, peeling the lather from his hard flat face. Adolph could see his eyes in the mirror, and they were frightening eyes.

“I want to know.”

“Well, I’ll get warm first. There is no hurry. Besides, if I keep on strolling about near the house, it may make somebody suspicious.”

Otto examined his chin in the mirror, thrusting it

forward as though daring someone to hit it.

“Get warm then, poor little man. But you will be on duty again at twelve. I want to know the kind of people who go into that house.”

Adolph found a handkerchief and blew his nose.

“Very good, sergeant-major. The poor private does all the dirty work.”

“And receives pay for it. Get out and shut the door. There’s a draught.”

Adolph shut the door, and going to his own room, took his flask from the drawer. It was empty, but Adolph knew that there was an abundance of liquor in the house, cherry, champagne, whisky, ordered in by Otto for the entertainment of Mr. Clapp. A whisky bottle had been opened, and Adolph filled his flask. Damn Otto! Why be afraid of a fellow in a nightshirt with large and bony feet? If one could have pushed Otto on to the Potsdam parade-ground in such a state, certain illusions of arrogance might have been chastened. Adolph slipped the flask into his pocket, and went out again to face the wind, but he did not go at once to the post of duty. Why should he expose himself to suspicion while Otto kept shrewdly in the background. Arson was a serious business, especially

so when it might include the cremating of innocent people. Adolph knew of a pub in the Essex Road where he had made friends with the barmaid, and where a good fire would be burning in the private bar. He could cherish his whisky, drink beer, and keep warm, and at half past twelve he would take a little walk in the direction of Sussex Terrace.

At a quarter past twelve Herr Adler went out to face the wind. Beer and the blonde receptiveness of the girl behind the bar had warmed him. Beer and blonde hair, and Bavaria in June ! Adolph drew his muffler over his chin, and felt that some colour had crept back into the world. The New River was frozen over, and upon the ice lay a dead cat and a collection of old tins. Slovenly people, these English ! Adolph came to the Painswick Road. It was inconveniently empty, for Herr Adler would have preferred to be less conspicuous in a crowd. Well, he would poke his nose round the corner of Sussex Terrace, and then go for a walk, and return to Aylwin Terrace shortly after one. He had reached Rye House and was turning the railed corner when a large person came swinging round it and met him face to face.

Mr. Clapp pulled up.

“ Good morning. Ach, yes, it is Herr Schulze’s friend.

And has Herr Schultze returned ? ”

Adolph found a watery smile. Damn this leviathan ! He was forever floundering where he should not be.

“ It is Herr Clapp, I think ? ”

“ I may presume to be that person. And has your friend ? ”

“ Yes, Otto is back. He is going to call upon you, I believe.”

“ Glad to see him at any time,” and Mr. Clapp rolled on, humming a tune, and asking himself questions.

The German had not been pleased to see him. And just why was he hanging about the purlieus of the Painswick Road ? Spying out the Land of Canaan ! Mr. Clapp was in a singing mood. He was bound for Upper Street to buy flowers, for he had received an invitation to the Hyde luncheon party. A nice gesture, that ! He was to be included as a friend, and perhaps as some material witness to a business understanding. Flowers for his hostess. Surely, and why not ? And what a whopping lie he had fobbed off on poor Charlotte. He had told her that he was attending a scientific demonstration, and might be asked to produce a drawing of Mr. John Hyde’s epoch making creation.

“ We may get a couple of guineas by it, my dear. You shall have that new rug you saw in Rackstraw’s.”

As though any such commercial consideration could enter his romantic head !

The warmth of beer and of blonde buxomness seeped out of Herr Adler's stomach. Damn Otto, damn the wind, damn Mr. Clapp, damn Bergman & Co ! If he had not been discovered in certain defalcations he would not have been compelled to volunteer for this forlorn hope. Adolph shivered. He walked up on the Painswick Road, inwardly juggling with those two hazards. Should he desert the cause of the Fatherland, go to the English police and blab, or attempt to cajole some reward out of Messrs. Hyde & Co. by denouncing the conspiracy ? But the man Hyde was a tough customer, and poor as a church rat. Moreover, the vengeance of Bergman & Co. was not a light peril to be challenged. Adolph shivered. He remembered a certain story whispered about the Works, of a French chemist who had known too much, and whose sense of honour had been shamelessly French. Rumour had it that the Frenchman had been thrown into a vat of molten metal, and had vanished, false teeth, buttons, watch and rings. Adolph shivered. The ruthlessness of Bergman & Co. was not to be forgotten.

It was five minutes to one when Adolph returned to the Painswick Road. He walked at a fast pace down it, hat

pulled low, muffler over mouth and chin, his hands stuffed into his overcoat pockets. He was within fifty yards of Sussex Terrace when he saw a smart covered carriage coming up the Painswick Road, drawn by a pair of greys, with a coachman and footman on the box. The carriage turned into Sussex Terrace, and stopped outside No. 1. The footman sprang down and opened the carriage door, and from it emerged a little old gentleman in a top hat and a coat with a fur collar. The footman rang the bell, and the door was opened by the hired waiter, but before Sir Christopher Steel disappeared within, he remembered the men who served him.

“ You must be cold, Gates. You had better wait and have some food.”

“ Thank you, sir,” said the coachman, “ I’d like the horses under cover.”

Sir Christopher had half a sovereign ready. He passed it to the footman.

“ Be back at three o’clock.”

“ Very good, sir.”

Even the shivering and hesitant Adolph was impressed by the suggestiveness of this incident. Money, and most obvious money, was entering No. 1 Sussex Terrace. Who was

the old gentleman with the handsome equipage ? A financier who was interested in the fellow Hyde's invention ? Adolph loitered, and watched the carriage drive away. He would like to have stopped it and asked the men to tell him to whom it belonged. He was about to move on when a cab appeared, and Adolph paused to watch it. This cab also turned into Sussex Terrace and stopped outside No. 1. Two gentlemen in top-hats and thick overcoats emerged from it, and were admitted to the house. Adolph's legs became active. Was this a conference, and no mere social occasion ? Otto needed to be told, and then Herr Adler was tempted by a sudden attack of carefulness. Should he conceal the facts from Otto ? No. There might be a more subtle way of discouraging adventurous violence. If he could convince Otto that intervention would come too late, and that Hyde appeared to have persuaded finance to take up his invention, Otto might listen to reason.

Herr Adler hurried back to Aylwin Terrace. The smell of cabbage and onion met him in the drab little hall. He felt himself disgusted by it. These vulgar smells ! He was craving for colour and sunlight, and musical emotion. If only he could persuade Schultze to leave this depressing country.

He went upstairs and found his friend with feet up before the fire. Adolph was very full of what he had seen, and if he exaggerated it, that was good stage-play. He made the scene dramatic.

“ We’re too late, brother. Hyde must have finished his work. Finance is taking the stage.”

He described what he had observed, and he transformed the growler into a second private carriage. Obviously, Hyde was giving no mere luncheon party. It was a social occasion gilded with interested gold.

Schultze got out of his chair, and stood with his back to the fire, staring into space. His face looked as though it had been hacked out of wood.

“ So ! No time to lose, little brother. The house must go up tonight or tomorrow ! ”

“ I met that fellow Clapp. He seemed curious.”

“ Damn the fat fool ! I’ll go round presently and ask him to supper for tomorrow.”

Adolph’s face was that of a pathetic and frightened monkey.

“ Is it worth while ? We’re too late.”

“ Go to the devil,” said Schultze, “ even if we are too late we can wipe out that scoundrel.”

II

IT is possible to associate the eternal conflict between English Realism & Romanticism with the exceeding nastiness of the island's weather. Undoubtedly the English weather is a realist during nine months of the year, and vaguely romantic during the other three, but the English are a stubborn breed, clinging to illusions even when a grey melancholy persists through most of the calendar. Or, maybe, is the weather's realism that provokes in man an insurgent romanticism, and undoubtedly it was so in the case of Josiah Wedgewood Clapp. A passionate disciple of Rossetti and Burne James, he saw in the dark mirror of ugliness and gloom, other visions, other mysteries. Man, being so different from brother man, sees life so differently, shallowly and vulgarly, or richly and profoundly. To the artist, things are other than they seem. The colour and the song-spirit in him illuminates them. He might say with Kant that the Thing in Itself is never known, only our sense-rendering of it ; but the artist can claim that his inward vision transcends that of the senses, and that he can behold the splendours beyond the veil.

Mr. Clapp arrived at the door of No. 1 Sussex Terrace with a bunch of hot-house roses in his hand. The temporary man-servant took his hat and coat and preceded Mr. Clapp up the stairs. Even that one flight left the poor creature breathless, and his disability was potent, chronic bronchitis complicated by too much drink. Josiah Wedgewood was in his most impressionable mood. Death in a black coat was conducting him up the stairs, a pallid wretch who finished with surreptitious gusto the dregs of empty wine-bottles. Was it an omen ? Absit omen ! Death had his fingers on the handle of the drawing room door.

“ What name, sir, please ? ”

“ Clapp.”

A secret snigger seemed to crinkle up that pasty face, and then the pale eyes fell below their bladderlike lids. He was looking at Mr. Clapp's bouquet. Was there hothouse humour in that ? He opened the door, and in a husky voice announced him.

“ Mr. Clapp.”

To Josiah Wedgewood the room was different, everything and everybody in it were different. From the very first moment he had that strange feeling of feyness which would descend upon him on rare occasions and in all sorts of

situations. He realised that it had been redressed for the great event, but its atmosphere was that of a stage, prepared and somehow not quite real. It was to play a part, as were the people in it. There sat Puncinello by the fire, white headed, jocund of eye, and wearing a velvet jacket. Hyde had put on a frock coat, and the look lacked reality. He was an amateur actor primed for his part. As his Cassandra stepped forward to meet him, Mr. Clapp had the feeling that she was on the other side of the footlights, and he, a devotee, presenting a bouquet to the heroine in a Greek tragedy. She was very pale, and her eyes had a dark and enigmatic inwardness. Hyde looked flushed. Suspense affected them differently, even as the ultimate significance of it was different for each of them.

Mr. Clapp made a little bow, and presented his flowers.

"Oh, how lovely. Thank you so much."

Any word she might use somehow had the deep cadence of tragedy. Mr. Clapp, turning a little self-consciously to the other actors, had to make his jest and his gesture to justify this act of homage.

"I present an omen."

Uncle James chuckled. Hyde was tolerant and lofty.

"Many thanks, my dear fellow."

He needed no omen. Phoebus was up in his chariot.

III

MR. CLAPP stood in a dark corner on the window side of the room, with a glass of sherry in his hand, feeling rather like a large ghost whose presence was superfluous and shadowy. He observed the entry upon the stage of the Hyde demigods, announced in a husky snuffle by the poor parsnip of a waiter.

“ Sir Christopher Steel.”

Steel from Coventry. Or was it Birmingham ? Surely it should have been Sheffield ? But Mr. Clapp liked the look of Sir Christopher Steel, and was surprised by the surprise of liking him. What had he expected ? Some big bellied, florid bull of a man, or a creature of bland ruthlessness ? This little old gentleman with his bald head and his halo of white hair, had the face of a benign and gentle priest. Dignity too, and fine matters. Mr. Clapp believed that you could judge a man by the way he looked and spoke to a pretty woman, yes, even in the eighties. Sir Christopher had a way of saying the simplest things and making them appear sincere and convincing. If he said he

was glad, he was glad. A very clean old gentleman this, vivid even in age, and English worthy.

His manners had the Georgian flavour. He bowed as Ann Hyde introduced the others to him, but his bow to her had been a little deeper. Mr. Clapp, returning the courtesy, felt himself transferred to a period of brocade and powder.

“Glad to meet you, sir.”

Here was kindness without patronage.

Sir Christopher's courtesy marked down the lady. He took his sherry from her, and bowed again. He looked at her as he might have looked at a dark and lovely flower, with eyes that long ago had ceased to be greedy. The wrinkles round his eyes were humorous and kind.

“Your very good health, m'am.”

Even the m'am was courtly. And it was then that Hyde pushed into the picture, a new Hyde, somehow florid and pretentious, striking a false note in the Bach symphony. Mr. Clapp was conscious of subtle discord. Did the promise of success make a man a bounder so quickly?

“It is a great privilege, sir, to be able to demonstrate the new age to you.”

Sir Christopher gave him a quick glance. The new age? Ye Gods! Was he so old and obsolete? And why this almost

aggressive politeness ? Was the man shy, or was he feeling as he looked ?

“ One should not lose one’s curiosity, even at my age, Mr. Hyde.”

Hyde laughed, and raised his glass.

“ Pioneers never die, sir.”

“ Damn it,” thought Mr. Clapp, “ why doesn’t he leave the stage-craft to his lady ? ”

The sound of wheels in the street, the ringing of a bell, voices in the hall below. Mr. Leonard Wise and Mr. Watkins were following Death in a Black Coat up the Georgian stairs, and Mr. Wise was saying that he liked these old, straight up and down houses that stood like Wellington’s infantry at Waterloo. Mr. Wise had a loud, clear voice, and he spoke with the emphasis of a man who was accustomed to being listened to, and who might regard interruption as bad manners. The voice of the announcer sounded in contrast like the note of a cracked and muffled bell.

“ Mr. Leonard Wise, Mr. Watkins.”

Mr. Wise had the face of a handsome Tomcat, and also that creature’s complacency. His smile came and went with royal charm, and was completely without meaning. Mr. Watkins was thin and dark and very much on the alert ; he

had a nose, and was probably the brains of the business ! Mr. Clapp, who was the only person who needed introducing, liked neither of these gentlemen very well, for they belonged to a world that laughed tolerantly, if they laughed at all, at poets, schoolmasters, and curates. Your pictorial artist might be a different proposition, for his pictures might be purchased speculatively for a rise in prices.

They drank sherry. Mr. Wise, being a lady's man, was gallant to his hostess. It was very good sherry, and he said so. Uncle James did not buy grocer's wine. The two old gentleman had found each other and a mutual liking, for Mr. Guise had been trying to persuade Sir Christopher to take his chair, and this had led to a playful argument. Who was the elder, and so privileged in the matter of chairs ? Uncle James could give Sir Christopher five years, and having settled the point, Mr. Guise was allowed the privilege of age, to vacate the chair and insist upon Sir Christopher taking it. Hyde & Mr. Watkins were chatting by the window, and Hyde was drinking his third glass of sherry. Mr. Clapp had counted them, and observed his rising colour and animation. His host was talking rather flamboyantly and rhetorically on the inevitable

possibilities of the new source of power. Vested interests would have to be met and overcome, and conventional stupidities and obstructionism countered.

“ I know, sir, that when we try to put our invention on the road we shall be classed with traction engines. We shall be damned by every Hunt.”

Mr. Watkins sipped his sherry with thin lips, and listened attentively, and with caution. This fellow Hyde seemed rather up in the air. Was he the real thing or a damp squib ? Mr. Watkins and his nose savoured the bouquet of the wine, while the alert businessman in him made inward comments upon flamboyant fanatics.

The door opened, and the waiter's husky voice said ——
“ Luncheon is served, m'am.”

They went down to lunch, and Mr. Clapp would have been the last member of the procession had not Mr. Guise taken him by the elbow and given him a gentle push towards the stairs.

“ After you, my dear fellow.”

“ No, after you, sir.”

“ My privilege, Clapp, is to do what I please at my age.”

Uncle James liked Josiah Wedgewood Clapp, and Mr. Clapp liked Uncle James.

Mr. Guise had insisted upon the caterers doing the thing well, and he himself had provided the Dresden dinner-service, and the table-linen and silver. Ann Hyde sat down at a table that was ostensibly hers, with Sir Christopher on her right hand, and Mr. Leonard Wise on her left. Hyde sat opposite her, with Mr. Watkins on his right, and Josiah Wedgewood on his left. Uncle James lunched between Sir Christopher & Mr. Clapp. Real turtle soup ! Mr. Wise savoured it, looked appreciatively at his hostess and the china, and was persuaded that this fellow Hyde must have money as well as brains. He shared Cassandra's conversation with Sir Christopher, and being a diplomatist, in spite of his vanity, he was careful not to cut out the old fogey. Sir Christopher was to be interested, and if he was interested in Hyde's wife, the happy impression might be helpful, and the Hyde Internal Combustion Engine ceased to be an experiment and go into production. If Sir Christopher took up an invention, that invention was as good as made. The Steel Gas Engine was known all over the world, and Sir Christopher was sufficiently shrewd to step in and share an enterprise that might make one of his own products obsolete. How much was the old fellow worth ? Rumour had it that his fortune

ran into millions. Some people referred to him as the Uncrowned King of The Midlands. Mr. Leonard Wise lived in a world of such phrases.

Hyde very much the host, was still holding forth to Mr. Watkins. Mr. Clapp remained in shadowy isolation until Uncle James began to talk pictures and travel to him. Mr. Clapp, who had spooned with nervous carefulness at his soup, became a vocal man. Also, he gathered the impression that while Mr. Guise conversed with him, he was keeping an interested and watchful eye upon his nephew.

“ Form, Clapp, form. At my age one likes to control one’s environment. The Roman idea.”

“ Not new Rome, sir.”

“ Hardly. Order is a lovely thing.”

“ And that fastidious self-restraint which —— ? ”

“ Exactly,” said Uncle James, giving him a shrewd look, and then glanced past him at the man at the foot of the table. Mr. Clapp fidgeted with his table-napkin. Had he said the wrong thing, or said the right thing too meaningly ? Mr. Guise was silent for some seconds. He was wondering whether he misread John Hyde. Was the fellow going to make a splurging ass of himself like an urchin let loose in the larder ?

“ Simplicity and sincerity, Clapp, even though the sincerity may have a sharp edge to it.”

“ No pose, sir.”

“ Some of your painter’s pose.”

“ The moderns ? ”

“ Do you think a great artist ever poses ? ”

“ I should say not, sir. He is too much absorbed in the thing that is greater than himself.”

“ Exactly.”

Mr. Clapp glancing along the table, saw that his hostess, while listening to a bout of badinage between Sir Christopher and Mr. Wise, was also watching her husband. What was the question those dark eyes were asking ? Did a grown man behave like a boy in whom sex is turgid, and shock you with the knowledge that the child has vanished in the lout ?

Champagne. The waiter had opened it behind Hyde’s chair, and the wine was so much up that it spurted over John Hyde’s head.

“ Here, my lad. I may be God’s anointed, but why give me a bath ? ”

Hyde was not peeved, but rather pleased. Wit should flow like the wine. The waiter apologised.

“ Sorry, sir. It’s got a head on it.”

Mr. Guise’s lips moved, but he remained silent. Maybe he had been tempted to say that his nephew’s head seemed equally gassy, but the words were uttered to himself. The waiter, wrapping a napkin round the bottle, went round filling glasses. Hyde’s glass was the last thing to be filled, and he picked it up, and twiddling it by the stem, watched the bubbles rise in the golden liquid. Suddenly, he was upon his feet. A toast so early in the proceedings ? Mr. Clapp glanced upwards. Hyde should be looking towards his wife, and saluting the courage and devotion that had served him to splendidly.

“ Sir Christopher, may I toast you, and the spirit of the pioneer ? ”

The old man looked embarrassed. Mr. Clapp heard Mr. Guise emit a sound that was almost like a snarl. Damned fool ! Old Steel was just the sort of man to dislike this sort of flummery. Mr. Clapp felt Uncle James’ chair move. He too was on his feet.

“ Sit down, John. I claim the privilege of being first. I know that Sir Christopher Steel will excuse me. Ann, my dear, your health. I salute unselfishness.”

Sir Christopher rapped on the table, and rose to his feet.

The others followed him.

“ Quite right, sir. Madam, health and happiness.”

“ To our charming hostess,” said Mr. Wise.

Josiah Wedgewood looked at her with the eyes of a dog.

“ Mr. Hyde.”

Mr. Watkin’s lips moved, but his salute was a silent one.

As for Hyde, he stood there looking flushed and petulant.

Why had old James chosen to wipe his eyes so obviously ?

“ Your health, my dear.”

But Ann Hyde did not look at her husband.

CHAPTER 28

CIGARS and coffee. Cassandra had left the men to smoke and discuss that which was so fateful in the life of her husband. Mr. Clapp had become aware of two facts, firstly that Hyde had drunk too much champagne, secondly that the older men were not pleased with him.

“ Waiter. Where’s that damned fellow got to ? Ring the bell, Clapp, will you ? ”

Mr. Clapp left his chair, and with sombre deliberation and docility rang the bell. Uncle James was biting at his cigar and chewing it like a good American. His right foot waggled up and down. The door opened and the Black Death poked his head in. He had supposed the occasion finished, and had been in his shirt sleeves, washing up.

“ Yes, sir ? ”

“ You have forgotten the brandy.”

“ No, sir.”

“ The Napoleon brandy.”

Mr. Guise took the cigar out of his mouth.

“ My fault, Jack. I forgot it when you gave me the order,” and his bright eyes said “ Keep quiet, you fool. Does a little wine and some success go to your head so quickly.”

Mr. Leonard Wise, with a cat-like smile, crept into the conversation on velvet paws.

“ I think, Sir Christopher, I might explain that Mr. Hyde has been working on this invention for, how many years, Hyde ? ”

“ Seven,” said their host curtly.

“ As I said, it embodies several original ideas. We have the patents. Mr. Hyde has given me a demonstration. To me it was convincing, but you, as an expert —— ”

Sir Christopher nodded. He was more tolerant than these other men. He understood the divine or devilish afflatus that may take possession of those wild originals who can slave for years in garrets, perfecting a book or a picture or some strange mechanical device. This man Hyde might be a genius, even though wine and excitement went to his head. And why should he not be excited ? Mediocrity, even in temperament, does not bump its head against the stars.

“ I am more than interested. Seven years is a biblical number, Mr. Hyde.”

He looked kindly and shrewdly at the younger man. Why be too critical ? Was a man who had slaved and eaten bitter bread for seven years to be blamed for being a little tete montee ? Sir Christopher could say that he enjoyed a good

life, and that like Landor he had warmed both hands at the fire of it, but life had not left him cold and grudging, a supercilious sage who could not forgive a younger man his youth.

Hyde smiled. Maybe, the mature gentleness and courtesy of this old gentleman went deeper than mere words. Sir Christopher's eminence did not provoke you.

"It is a great day for me, sir, to see you in my house."

"Here, here," said Uncle James, "the man is more than the machine."

It was Mr. Guise who suggested that they should smoke their cigars upstairs in that workshop where the engine was to be demonstrated. He rose, giving Sir Christopher a little, gracious bow. Sir Christopher smiled and nodded at him. Mr. Leonard Wise beamed like a presiding prelate. Hyde, suddenly serious, as though sobered by the imminence of a trial and a judgement, was moved to think of the great man's comfort.

"Chairs. My lab isn't exactly a drawing room."

Uncle James gave him a kinder look.

"Flowers for the judge ! Yes, chairs, something comfortable."

There were two arm chairs in the room, and Mr. Clapp,

blessing his opportunity, picked up the larger of them as though it had no more weight than a chip basket, swung it up and held it over his head, legs upwards, like a great cowl. Mr. Guise chuckled at him. "Hercules lifts Antaeus." This piece of by-play brought a new fluidity and friendliness into the company. Hyde picked up the smaller chair.

"Shall I go first with my hip-bath and lead the way?"

"Lead on, sir," said Mr. Clapp, "I'll guard the rear."

Ann Hyde, sitting by the drawing room fire, heard the men passing up the stairs, but she had no wish to join them. She would sit and wait and listen, as she had waited through the years for success to come to that big child, her husband. She would nurse her suspense like a baby in her lap, feel its lips tugging at her breasts. Success, fame, wealth. These things had begun to frighten her. What would John make of the new world if it came to him; what would her part be in it? The froth of champagne spilled upon his head! Was that a symbol and an omen?

The voices died away. She sat and listened. She knew that she would be able to hear that other sound, the heart-beat of the new world. What if it faltered, failed and stopped? A mechanism can be a peevish and a perverse

creation. What irony if the thing were to betray temperament like its master, and refuse to function !

She sat and listened, and suddenly she heard that distant muffled rhythm, just like the heart-beat of the house. It continued. There was no faltering, no break in it. She heard it increase its pace, slow down, and again grow rapid. She had held her breath. John was putting his iron horse through its paces, and the beast was not failing him.

She watched the clock. Five minutes, ten minutes, a quarter of an hour, then — silence.

She could bear to be alone no longer, but climbing the stairs, stood listening outside the door of John Hyde's Holy of Holies. She heard her husband's voice ; he was explaining or rather demonstrating some of the secret features of his invention to Sir Christopher Steel, and Sir Christopher was asking questions. They spoke in technical language, but some of it she understood. The old man's alert mind had fastened upon the most significant features of her husband's work.

“ It's so simple, sir.”

“ Things are simple, Hyde, when once they work. How did you get the idea of that jet ? ”

“ Just came to me in my bath.”

Mr. Leonard Wise, who had been compelled to silence, found his chance to escape from it.

“ And did you cry Eureka ? ”

“ No, I believe I threw the cake of soap at the ceiling.”

“ I’ve done that with suet pudding,” said a voice.

“ Recently ? ”

There was laughter, and the listener’s hearts seemed to beat more easily. Men did not laugh unless wheels were turning well. She was conscious of exultation, yet, transfixing it came that secret fear. She slipped away down the stairs, and into the empty room, and some impulse made her kneel down at a chair by the window. It was her faldstool. “ Dear God, give him success, but do not take him from me.”

Voices. They were coming down the stairs. She got to her feet quickly, breathlessly. She was standing by the fire, her elbow on the mantelpiece, one foot on the fender, when the door opened. Her face was strangely serene.

Sir Christopher walked in. His face had a kind of brightness, the benignity of an old man who was glad to speak good words.

“ Well, Mrs. Hyde, I think your husband is going to make history.”

She steadied herself. How absurd that her knees should feel so weak.

“ I’m so glad. Then, you think —— ? ”

“ I want your husband to cooperate with me in building a road model. I think you will have to come down into the Midlands, unless you think us too provincial ! ”

Her eyes said, “ I think you are a dear.”

II

MR. CLAPP was feeling sad. Was it due to a sense of frustration, or the effects of too much champagne ? He had followed those more successful men out of the house, and Hyde had given him one finger to shake, while looking past him and raising the other arm in a roman salute to Sir Christopher’s carriage. Mr. Clapp had been mute. He had watched that carriage move off with its two grey horses and men in livery to return Sir Christopher to his house in Eton Square, and though he was not an envious person, Mr. Clapp had felt labelled as superfluous. What would he have done to be a junior master in the school common-room if the fellow had given him one finger to shake ? Placed him on the table and spanked him ? Perhaps !

So, Cassandra had seen her Hector crowned. The allusion was apposite but not accurate, and Josiah Wedgewood asked himself why he thought of her as Cassandra. Just because her eyes were dark, and nature had shaped her like Sarah Siddons for the part of the Tragic Muse ? Poetic justice was not always valid. When Browning had written " Oh, to be in England now that April's here," the amending of the text was obvious. " Oh, to be out of England ! " How rarely was an April of the poet's dream, and how much of illusion might emanate from dark eyes and midnight hair, and a mouth that was cherry red in a pale and tired face.

Mr. Clapp crept along the railings to his own door, and let himself in, and took off his hat and coat. He did not want to meet Charlotte, for Charlotte was the April of reality and not of poetic fancy. North east wind, grey sky ! Winter had its justifications, for you did not expect too much from it. Mr. Clapp slid his large feet over the hall carpet towards the Rookery, like a sad dog retreating to its kennel. Surely, Charlotte had not heard him ? But she had.

" Wedgewood."

The bright little acid voice came down the stairs, and Mr. Clapp was conscious of an inward shiver.

“ Yes, my dear.”

Charlotte had been at the window observing that luxurious equipage.

“ Who was that, Wedgewood ? ”

“ Who was what ? ”

“ Don’t shout up the stairs. Come up and talk properly.”

Mr. Clapp had not shouted. His depressed mood was not capable of producing such a hearty noise. This was fate, his eternal fate, to be fussed and catechised by this human canary.

“ I’m coming, my dear.”

Charlotte waited for him by the fire. She was feeling offended. Why had not she been asked to the party ?

“ Who was that in the carriage ? ”

“ Sir Christopher Steel.”

The name conveyed nothing to Charlotte, save that the gentleman was a knight or a baronet.

“ Never heard of him, Wedgewood.”

“ You wouldn’t, my dear. He is not of our world.”

“ Whose fault is that ? And who is he ? ”

“ A very great man in the Midlands.”

“ Soap or something ? ”

“ No, engineering, engines, machines.”

“ And what was he doing next door ? ”

“ Lunching, my dear.”

Mrs. Clapp twitched her shoulders.

“ Don’t be so stupid, Wedgewood. There was some other reason.”

“ Business, my dear.”

“ Business ? ”

“ You see, Mr. Hyde is something of a genius, and he had something to show Sir Christopher.”

“ Genius ! Tch, why doesn’t he buy his wife a new hat. Poor dowdy creature.”

Mr. Clapp was on the point of exploding when the front door bell rang.

“ I wonder who that can be ? ”

“ Yes, I wonder,” said her husband, restraining a desire to lay the lady on the sofa and smack her.

III

ELLEN opened the drawing room door.

“ It’s the German gentleman, m’am. He wants to speak to the master.”

“ Herr Schultze ? ” chirped Charlotte.

“ Yes, m’am.”

“ Ask Mr. Schultze up.”

Mr. Clapp could not slap his wife, but there were rare occasions when he could suppress her, and this was one of them. He rose up with authority. In a large, male, and deliberate voice he ordered Ellen to show the gentleman into the dining room. No, on second thoughts, he would go down at once and interview Herr Schultze.

“ The gen’leman is in the dining room, sir. I showed him in.”

“ Very good, Ellen.”

Mr. Clapp walked solidly out of the room and down the stairs, and Ellen closed the door on the lady, for Ellen had sufficient wit to know when such an act was advisable. Mr. Clapp found Herr Schultze straddling in front of the fire, and looking very much at his ease. A smile came on his face directly Mr. Clapp appeared in the doorway. He had been preparing that smile.

“ Good day, sir.”

“ Glad to see you, Herr Schultze.”

They shook hands, and the German’s hand was friendly.

“ I came to see, sir, if you would join us in a little musical party. It is my friend’s birthday.”

“ Tonight ? ”

“ No, tomorrow night, sir. Just a bachelor party. You to me very kind have been.”

“ Delighted, my dear fellow.”

“ I afraid am that we ascend cannot to inviting your charming lady. You see, in lodgings —— ”

“ I quite understand, my dear fellow. What time ? ”

“ Seven o'clock, sir, and bring your music.”

Mr. Clapp owned a box of cigars which he kept for very special occasions, and he took the box from a corner-cupboard and offered Herr Schultze a cigar. Herr Schultze accepted it, with a little bow, and another debonair smile. Mr. Clapp was thinking of Shakespeare, and that well worn and rather melodramatic saying that a man can smile and smile, and be a villain. What was behind all this ? Did this German gang want him out of the way while they indulged in violence ? Why ask him to supper ? Would the drink be drugged ? Mr. Clapp, lighting a spill for the service of Herr Schultze's cigar, thought rapidly and shrewdly. No. 1 Sussex Terrace would have to be warned.

“ In good condition, I hope ? ”

“ Pardon ? ”

“ The cigar. I smoke a pipe.”

Herr Schultze applied the end of the cigar to the flame, sucked, and blew smoke.

“Excellent, sir.”

“Good.”

“But keep you I must not.”

Herr Schultze took his hat from the table, and Mr. Clapp with a great air of friendliness, showed him to the door.

“Auf wiedersehen.”

“Seven o’clock, sir.”

“I will be there.”

Herr Schultze marched past the door of No. 1, with the cigar cocked in his mouth. He did not look at the Hyde house, but he smiled as he passed it.

Mr. Clapp, hands in pockets, head bowed in thought, walked to the Rookery door. He had slammed that other door decisively as a hint to the lady above. Charlotte had been excluded from yet another party, and he supposed that he might have to tell her so.

“Wedgewood.”

Mr. Clapp swore within himself.

“Yes, my dear?”

“Has Herr Schultze gone?”

“He has.”

" You should have asked him up."

" It was a business visit, my dear."

" Business ! What did he want ? "

Mr. Clapp concocted two crisp lies.

" He wanted to borrow a pound from me."

" A pound ! "

" Yes, and to sell me some wine. He has asked me round to taste it tomorrow evening."

That was a poser for Charlotte.

" Does Herr Schultze deal in wine ? I thought —— "

" Must do, my dear, mustn't he ? You thought Herr Schultze was above such vulgar activities."

" You must not buy any wine, Wedgewood."

" No, but I can go round and taste it. After all, the fellow does owe us something."

IV

MR. CLAPP rang the bell of No. 1 Sussex Terrace. It was Cassandra who opened the door to him, but a different Cassandra. Her new black satin frock bought for the occasion, had been put off, and she was wearing an apron.

Mr. Clapp took off his hat to her. He happened to glance

at her hands, and was aware of her putting her hands behind her back. Was she ashamed of them ? Ye Gods, why should her hands have to serve as the hands of a drudge ? Mr. Clapp knew, or believed, that his very first gesture, had he been in Hyde's place, would have been to give her other and coarser hands for love and labour.

"Excuse me, is your husband in ?"

"Yes. He is with Mr. Guise."

She too, was sad, most strangely sad, even on this triumphant day, and Mr. Clapp wanted to say to her, "Dear lady, why hide your hands from me ? They would be wonderful, were they covered in coal dust."

"I wonder if he would see me ? Something has occurred."

"I am sure he would."

A sudden thought struck him.

"By the way, when is the child coming back ?"

"Tomorrow."

"Tomorrow !"

So infinitely serious and bothered did his large kind face look to her that she divined the danger.

"But she mustn't. I mean —— Well, may I see your husband. I think he will understand."

She closed the door and led the way into the room where

her party had been held, and to Mr. Clapp it had a strange emptiness. Even the fire had been allowed to go out. She stood hesitant by the window, looking out into the street, her hands hidden under her apron.

“ I want you to tell me.”

“ Dear lady, need I worry you ? Your husband and I can save you that. After all —— ”

She turned and looked at him steadfastly.

“ I wish to know. You see, a man can become so absorbed —— ”

“ Yes, that’s natural. Please understand that I may be making a mountain out of a mole hill, but I feel that neither you nor Rachel should be in this house tomorrow night.”

“ Tell me why.”

“ These Germans have asked me to supper tomorrow night. That may seem meaningless to you. You see, I have been doing some secret service on my own.”

She said, “ I know. And thank you.”

Mr. Clapp’s face went all shimmery.

“ I rather think they suspect me. They want me out of the way on a particular night. And how ? Oh, well, drugged drink or something. We won’t go into that. But I have a

most feeling that something is planned for tomorrow."

"What would you have me do?"

He stood thinking.

"You could meet Rachel at the station. Do you know the train?"

"Yes."

"And wouldn't it be possible for you to go with the Gregsons to Southend for a night or two. You could stay at The Royal. It is a comfortable old place."

"And leave my husband?"

"Well, let him decide. I know what I should do. Besides, if we are prepared ——"

Her eyes were downcast. She smiled faintly, and then looked up at him.

"We? Why should you trouble?"

Mr. Clapp gave a shrug of the shoulders, cleared his throat, and made a mumbling reply.

"Not virtue, dear lady, just doing what one pleases."

V

IT was she who suggested that he should go round to the Rye House door.

“ Don’t tell him that we have talked it over.”

Mr. Clapp stammered a reply.

“ No, no, of course not. Any suggestion will come from me.”

He walked out into the early winter dusk, and round the high iron railings to the door of the Rye House. A bitter wind might be blowing, but Mr. Clapp felt warm within. Oh wonderful reality. She trusted him, almost they were conspiring together behind the dark curtain of this strange adventure. Mr. Clapp was staring abstractedly over the roof tops of the sober little houses opposite when Maria opened the door.

“ Yes, sir ? ”

Mr. Clapp swung round like a startled dreamer.

“ Oh, is Mr. Hyde here ? ”

“ Yes, but —— ”

“ It is very urgent. I must see him.”

Maria looked him over with those grave Italian eyes, and then she stepped back and let him in.

“ Will you wait here, please. What name ? ”

“ Clapp. Yes, don’t worry, I’ll wait here.”

He was Ye Perfect Gentle Knight.

Maria disappeared up the stairs. Uncle James was

smoking a pipe before the fire, Hyde sitting at the table jotting down figures on a sheet of paper.

“ A Mr. Clapp to see you. He says it is important.”

Hyde showed impatience.

“ Bother the fellow. I’m busy.”

“ Shall I tell him so, sir ? ”

Uncle James gave Maria her answer, looking up at her impassive and loyal face.

“ Ask Mr. Clapp up, Maria.”

That was sufficient for Maria. She knew who was master in his house, and Uncle James, with ironic eyebrows, spoke tersely to the man at the table.

“ What is the objection ? ”

“ Rather a blundering fool.”

“ I think not, my lad. The elephant is a wise beast.”

It was Mr. Guise, who, as master of the house, met Josiah Wedgewood at the door of the sitting room, and with a jocund courtesy made him very welcome. Hyde nodded at the visitor, and his black brows stressed impatience. He and Uncle James had been working out figures, the score of Hyde’s mechanical masterpiece in all its measures, and this interruption was a bore. Mr. Clapp sat down beside the fire, and being a sensitive person, he was alive to the

tension in the room. Hyde's air suggested that in the course of twenty four hours he had become the great man, absorbed in affairs, and too gravely occupied to tolerate casual interruption. Mr. Clapp felt like a Roman client kept waiting in his patron's ante-room.

" Well ? "

The cock of the head, and the pause were discourteous.

" It concerns those Germans."

Hyde laughed.

" My dear fellow, they are out of the picture. We need not worry now about such people. But what is the latest scare ? "

Mr. Clapp began to feel hot about the ears.

" You may think so, Mr. Hyde, but —— "

" Let's have the evidence."

Uncle James was knocking out his pipe, and listening very attentively.

" They have asked me for supper tomorrow."

Hyde's black eyebrows became more ironic.

" My dear fellow, I don't see the connection."

Mr. Clapp began to explain, growing more and more conscious as he did so of the seeming silliness of his theory, and of Hyde's half concealed scorn of it.

“ Well, what of it ? ”

“ It may be egotism, but I think they want me out of the way.”

“ Nosey Parker in excelsis, what ! ”

Mr. Clapp went very red, and became dumb ; not so Mr. Guise, who sat refilling his pipe.

“ I rather agree with out visitor. One should be grateful —— ”

Hyde pushed his chair back, and got up to stride about the room.

“ Do you really suggest that these Germans contemplate some sort of attack on my house ? ”

Mr. Clapp sat solid and still.

“ I do, most emphatically so.”

“ Bosh, my dear fellow ! ”

Uncle James was lighting a spill. He held the flame to his pipe and when it was well alight, he knocked out the spill and turned to the schoolmaster.

“ I think I agree with you, Mr. Clapp. Jack, you have developed a monstrous head in twenty four hours. There's candour for you. Take it or leave it.”

Hyde's head gave a jerk ; he looked angrily at his uncle.

“ Oh, very well. The melodrama is on. Any suggestions,

Clapp ? ”

Mr. Clapp answered him very quietly.

“ Yes, if you will forgive them. I should be on my guard tomorrow. I should move your wife and child out of the house.”

Uncle James nodded.

“ Absolutely right, Mr. Clapp. Do I keep a pistol by me for nothing ? Any further suggestions ? ”

“ I hear, sir, that Rachel is coming back tomorrow. Could not she and her mother go away for a day or two ? ”

Hyde was standing looking down at the large man, and something seemed to amuse him.

“ What a chivalrous person you are, Clapp ! I don't object to the petticoats disappearing for a day or two. But where ? O, yes, they might go down to the sea with Mary and her doctor-man. What do you think, Uncle ? ”

“ I think it is a very sound idea.”

CHAPTER 29

UNDOUBTEDLY Mr. Clapp was fey. He appeared to divine all manner of moods and manifestations on that January morning. John Hyde had become the demi-god *in excelsis*, floating upon the clouds of a furious conceit, or like an intoxicated scientist in a balloons surveying the earth mapped out below him, and claiming it as his. Surely, the Wise Old book covered all the vanities and frailties of humanity. Did the devil tempt man as he had tempted Christ, carrying him to some high peak and offering him power and glory, provided that he knelt and worshipped his own vanity, which may be the Spirit of Evil ?

At nine o'clock that morning, Mr. Guise, to maintain the illusion of separate establishments, toddled round to No. 1 Sussex Terrace. He had been expected. Hyde's wife opened the door, and Uncle James' quick eyes saw that all was not well with her.

" All packed and ready, my dear ? "

She knelt down by the fire, and her profile was pensive.

" Yes, uncle."

Mr. Guise observed her, and felt in the breast pocket of his coat. John's sudden triumphal approach towards wealth

and fame did not appear to have brought happiness to his wife.

“ A little present, my dear.”

He held out two very clean and new ten pound notes. She glanced at them, and seemed to flinch.

“I can’t. You have given us so much.”

Nonsense, child. Miserliness at my age may be a passion to be kicked down the front steps. I want you to take a week by the sea with Rachel.”

She was in a dilemma. She had three shillings and twopence in her purse, and John seemed to have forgotten to remember that railway tickets and hotel bills cost money.

“ Take it, Nan.”

She put out a hand and took the notes, and folding them up, tucked them into her bodice.

“ Someday I’ll pay you back.”

“ Why should you ? May I not be allowed the pleasure of giving please ? Ordered Tom Trite ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ He can wait at King’s Cross and drive you to Fenchurch Street, and then bring John back.”

She hesitated for a moment.

“ John isn’t going.”

Mr. Guise’s white brow bristled.

“ What ? ”

“ He wants to work on one or two last details.”

“ He does, does he ! Well, my dear, I think I had better stay and look after John. He is in a kind of fog of obfuscated exaltation. Why shouldn’t good friend Clapp act as guardian ? ”

“ Uncle, I couldn’t ask him.”

“ But I can. I like that large creature. I’ll go round now.”

On this cold morning Mr. Clapp had lit the stove in the Rookery, and was smoking a pipe and playing with a box of water-colours. The particular study upon which he was lavishing love and pigment bore the title “ England - As Seen From Newland’s Corner - Late October.” Mr. Clapp’s brushes might be laying on autumn tints, golds and greens, and maroons and saffrons, but as he sucked his pipe and stroked the paper with his brush, and inner man in him listening. Like some prophet of old he felt that he was to receive a summons, and hear the voice of the Lord.

The bell rang, and Mr. Clapp raised his head with an air of gentle acquiescence, took his pipe out of his mouth, and

put the brush in water. He heard Ellen go to the door, and voices, a voice that he recognised. So, the summons had come ! Mr. Clapp rose, opened the Rookery door, and saw Ellen taking Mr. Guise's hat.

“ Good morning, sir.”

“ Oh, you're in, Clapp. Good. May I have a word with you ? ”

Mr. Clapp opened the dining room door.

“ Please go in, sir. Yes, I happened to be in.”

Mr. Clapp stood and listened to Mr. Guise, like a man listening to a story, the end of which he knew. Would he see Mrs. Hyde safely to King's Cross, and put her and Rachel into the cab for Fenchurch Street ? Most certainly he would.

“ Thanks, Clapp. I don't trust these Germans, and Master John Hyde is so like a boy with a new box of soldiers.”

Mr. Clapp concealed his exultation behind a stout and schoolmastery formalism.

“ Yes, I quite understand, sir. I am pretty sure that the house is watched, and I rather think that tonight I may have to play the sagacious beast.”

“ What about the danger, Clapp ? ”

“ Danger, sir ? ”

" Those Germans are not little Lord Fauntleroy's."

Mr. Clapp laughed.

" Oh, that's quite all right, sir. I have a pretty strong head. I can look after myself."

Uncle James nodded at him approvingly.

" I should say you could, Clapp, I should say you could."

Mr. Clapp made an apologetic noise behind his hand, and coughed.

" Too much smoking, sir. What time will you expect me ? "

" At a quarter to twelve. Trite can drive you back here."

" Thanks very much, sir."

Mr. Guise shook hands with him, walked to the door, and paused.

" I'm sitting up tonight in my own house, Clapp, yes, with a pistol ready. Just what do you propose to do ? "

" Follow the gentlemen, if they go out."

" Will you be in a state to —— ? "

" I think so, sir. I can carry my liquor, but I'll let them think me well soused."

" Good man. You had better ring my bell if they begin to act suspiciously."

" I will, sir, unless —— "

" Unless ? "

" I have to act in a hurry. If so, I shall use my fists."

" These fellows may be armed, Clapp."

" Wouldn't letting off pistols in a back garden attract too much attention, sir ? "

" Yes, probably you are right. Ever worn a knuckle-duster ? "

" No, sir."

" Come round to me some time this afternoon, and I'll let you have one."

II

AN astonished and shocked Charlotte, her little beak of a nose almost touching the glass, saw her husband standing on the footwalk and holding open the door of Tom Trite's cab. Too much inquisitiveness may prove rough medicine, and if Mrs. Clapp was shocked by what she saw, she was to be still more shocked by what followed. Tom Trite appeared, carrying a small trunk which he tucked into the cab. Then came a figure in black, and Josiah Wedgewood, holding the door open with one hand, allowed his other hand to assist the lady.

Mrs. Clapp's lips nibbled under her thin nose.

“ Well, really ! ”

Almost she was persuaded to open the window and recall her husband to a consciousness of home and duty. He disappeared and closed the door. Tom Trite was up on his box.

“ Gee up, Jenny,” and the cab moved off.

Mrs. Clapp was astounded, so much so that she remained with her face pressed to the window long after the cab had vanished around the corner. What incredible behaviour ! So that was —— ! And then the final and violent suspicion assailed poor Charlotte. Was Josiah Wedgewood eloping with the lady ? Oh, the baseness and the duplicity of man !

Mrs. Clapp rang the bell and prostrated herself on the sofa. Ellen, looking out into the passage to identify the sinner, saw the drawing room bell still vibrating. “ Drat her,” said Ellen, “ what’s the matter now ? ” For the hysterical jangling of the bell was no mere summons to her to toll upstairs and put coal upon the fire. Had Ellen been literary and alliterative she would have described this exhibition as “ Tintinnabulations in Temper. ” Ellen stodged up the stairs, and did not trouble to knock at the door.

“ Yes, m’am.”

Mrs. Clapp had her handkerchief out and was sniffing into it.

“ I don't feel very well, Ellen.”

“ No, m'am.”

“ Fetch me my smelling salts and the Eau de Cologne.”

A disgusted Ellen closed the door and went upstairs for the articles in question. Tantrums ! All because poor old Josh had gone out to a party without her ! That was Ellen's diagnosis. She found the bottles on Mrs. Clapp's dressing-table, and withdrawing the stopper from the smelling-bottle, sniffed at it. Pooh, what nasty stuff ! Ellen sneezed, and replugged the bottle. Well, some compensation was indicated. It was her afternoon off, and she was going out to meet her young man, so Ellen took off her cap, poured some of the scent into the palm of her left hand and anointed her hair. She might as well smell nice when Syd put his arm around her. As for her betraying the perfume to Mrs. C. she would stuff the other bottle under the lady's nose.

“ Here you are, m'am.”

Ellen's red hand pushed the unstoppered stimulus under Mrs. Clapp's beak.

“ Take a good sniff, m'am.”

Mrs. Clapp gulped and sneezed, and then grabbed the bottle.

“ Too close, girl.”

Girl indeed ! Ellen planked the Eau de Cologne on the table beside the sofa.

“ There you are, m’am. I thought you might be feeling faint and wanted the salts.”

“ I have a very sensitive nose. Pull the blind down.”

Sensitive my eye ! Ellen jerked down the blind.

“ Will the master be back for dinner ? ”

“ I don’t know. I shan’t need dinner. I have one of my headaches coming on.”

Ellen left her. She knew these headaches. As a rule they culminated in severe verbal chastisements of Mr. Clapp. Nor was Charlotte feeling at all faint. Her temper was in furious fettle. If Wedgewood did come back, he would hear something that was not to his advantage.

III

MR. CLAPP cared for none of these things. He was the shy and gentle knight *in excelsis*, his large bowler hat on his knees, and his hands folded over it, elbows pressed to his

sides, a figure of superlative stillness. He was alone with Her in a cab ! Oh, wonderful day, oh, exquisite occasion ! Her cloak brushed against his coat, and yet Mr. Clapp felt her to be some marvellous creature, remote and mysterious. How was it that a particular woman made you feel like this, while an other provoked you to a mere romp between the sheets ? An utter dumbness possessed him. The silence was the silence of a little sanctuary on wheels.

Mr. Clapp felt that he ought to say something. He fumbled for his watch and glanced at it.

“ I think we shall be in plenty of time.”

She answered with a movement of the head. She seemed to be all profile, looking out of her window at drab streets, the incorrigible ugliness of outer London. Mr. Clapp cleared his throat, and wondered how Burne Jones or Rossetti would have painted her in her dark loveliness.

“ I expect Rachel has profited by the good farm food.”

Ass ! What a silly, suggestive splurge ! He should have said country air, not farm food. And then she turned and looked at him, and the soul of Josiah Wedgewood Clapp was mute.

“ Need you and I make conversation ? ”

“ Forgive me,” said he, “ I’m such a shy and blundering

sort of fool."

A hand slipped from under her cloak and rested for a moment upon his.

"Oh, no. You feel things. Let's just be quiet. So few people understand."

"Trees sleeping in the moonlight."

"The sands sipping at the sea."

"No monkey urchin-man scrambling in the branches or throwing stones at the mermaid's tail."

"Yes, just that."

A supreme contentment possessed Josiah Wedgewood Clapp. He, the fat schoolmaster, the suburban artist, was poet to her. He understood. Great God, how very wonderful! Her hand had lingered on his. Was this the Pentonville Road, this sudden dream-battlemented, mysterious highway? Surely, they were driving down together into some miraculous world, a world of loveliness and the sweet assuagement of secret sympathies. "How strange," thought Mr. Clapp, "I can be near her and look at her and be infinitely content. Those crude physical contacts! Good God, somehow it would be sacrilege. She has touched my hand. I understand. I am her friend."

So, Tom Trite trundled them down the Pentonville Road,

and Mr. Clapp's spirit was no longer in prison. All the beauty, the colour and music of life seemed in that cab, and his heart was the heart of a boy. Just before they reached the station her gloved hand came out and rested again momentarily on his.

"Thank you. You are my friend."

Mr. Clapp was profoundly moved. He raised her gloved hand, and saluted it.

"Madam, always I shall be at your service."

IV

THEY stood side by side on the platform, waiting. The train came rolling in with what Mr. Clapp thought was unusual deliberation and solemnity. He saw two heads at a window. He waved, and the children waved back.

Doors swung open. George was the first out, but he remembered to help the lady. Rachel ran to her mother and was embraced. George danced up to Mr. Clapp.

"I've shot a rabbit."

"By Jove, have you!" said Mr. Clapp, showing himself suitably impressed.

" We've got it in a hamper. I say, I've put on six pounds."

Mr. Clapp laughed. He was ready to laugh at everything and anything.

" Then, we must have been starving you, George."

George looked shocked.

" Oh, no, I didn't mean that."

Ann and Mary were kissing each other.

" My dear, thank you for being so good. I'm taking Rachel down to Southend for a week."

" Are you ? I'm so glad. We can put you up."

" No, my dear. I am going to The Royal. I expect they can take us in. I have a cab waiting."

" I'll ask Corrie about it."

" No, no, please don't. You have done so much. I don't want to —— "

" Yes, I understand."

Dr. Corrie was supervising the activities of a porter.

" That hamper, and the bag. Four trunks in the van. I shall want a cab."

" Very good, sir."

Dr. Gregson turned and shook hands with Mr. Clapp.

" Well, Clapp, bored with the holidays ? "

His facetiousness concealed curiosity. Why was Clapp

here ? Just to show politeness and to ensure the Gregson patronage ? But something more attractive than Mr. Clapp was waiting to be saluted.

“ Well, Ann, my dear, pining for Torquay ? ”

“ Ann’s coming down to Southend for a week, Corrie.”

“ Is she ? Splendid. The spare room —— ”

His wife gave him a meaning look and a faint shake of the head.

“ No, The Royal. She needs a rest.”

Dr. Corrie raised facetious eyebrows. Well, you never knew what women did want, and why. He walked off briskly with the porter to see the proper trunks loaded on to the barrow. George and Rachel were holding hands, and Mr. Clapp, smiling upon them, saw himself in the small boy.

“ Well, you have had a good time, you two.”

“ Rather,” said George, “ I taught Rachel to skate.”

Rachel looked large eyed at Mr. Clapp.

“ He thinks he did. It was Uncle Will, really.”

“ Oh, I say, that’s —— ”

“ Never contradict a lady, George,” said Mr. Clapp, wagging a large finger.

The procession passed to the waiting cabs. Tom Trite was down, ready to deal with his share of the luggage. The

porter hailed a four wheeler. Mr. Clapp stood a little apart, rather like a man who belonged to some other world.

Mrs. Hyde looked over her shoulder at him, but he shook his head and smiled.

“ No. I'll walk home. Exercise is good for the fat.”

Her glance lingered on him for a moment, and then the bustling Dr. Corrie armed her into the cab.

“ Like the kids with you ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ The more the merrier, what. Come on you two.”

Dr. Corrie tipped the porter, shook hands rather casually with Mr. Clapp, and followed his wife into the cab.

“ All right, cabbie. I say, Mary, what was Clapp doing ? ”

“ Just being kind, Corrie.”

There were times when Mary Gregson felt a little bored with the medical student in her husband.

Mr. Clapp re-climbed the Pentonville hill with its Dickens houses and ribbons of grey roadway and grey sky, past the green-banked reservoir of The New River Company to Islington's Angel. His own sweet angel had vanished between the heads of two amorini, but Mr. Clapp was a most happy man. She had called him friend ; she had given him

glances that a woman gives so rarely to a man other than her mate, not ogling stares, but the meeting of spirit with spirit. He understood. What greater splendour could be his than to be crowned by such faith, though he wore no plumed helmet, but only a hard felt hat.

Mr. Clapp's heart was singing in him as he came to Sussex Terrace, and let himself in and hung up his hat and coat. The smell of dinner drifted up the kitchen stairs, but Josiah Wedgewood was obsessed by other savours. He climbed the stairs. He had better look in on Charlotte. He opened the door, to find the room in semi-darkness, and a figure stretched upon the sofa.

"Hallo, my dear. What's this, a headache?"

Outraged emotion flew in his face.

"Heart-ache, Wedgewood. How could you?"

"Could I, what?"

"Drive off with that woman. Disgraceful. Sneaking out, and ——"

Mr. Clapp fell heavily out of heaven. He was conscious of shock, confusion. And then, the other man in him struggled back to aliveness, the infinite restraint of the philosopher in the presence of raw emotion.

"My dear, don't talk such nonsense. I was asked to see a

certain person safely to her station."

Mrs. Clapp sniffled.

"How very likely. I know, I'm a mere ——"

The storm was imminent, thunder, lightening, and torrents of self-pitying rain. Mr. Clapp laid two large hands on the crisis.

"Don't be a fool, Charlotte. By Jove, if you don't behave like a reasonable being, I'll smack you."

And smack her he did.

CHAPTER 30

THE Germans may hold that men are mere ticks in the beard of nature, with some super-beast, hoofed and tusked, straddling humanity, but when Mr. Clapp set out for Aylwyn Terrace and the unknown adventure, it was with the absurd gaiety of a man who felt irresponsibly free. Possibly, the smacking of Charlotte and her reduction to clothed sanity had been somewhat the act of a god, but Josiah Wedgewood was a soft hearted person, sufficiently human to pity and pet a poor little yellow-haired egoist. Mr. Clapp swung along like a big ship sailing the sea, the flag of romance at the masthead, Mr. Guise's knuckle-duster in his pocket. What were these Germans up to ? It was his affair to play the genial, bibulous fool, and while keeping one eye open, to subside into alcoholic stupor.

Sooty hollies shivered in the windy darkness. Mr. Clapp saw the particular house's number silhouetted in the glass panel above the door. He groped for the iron gate, found it, climbed the six steps. Why steps ? What a silly idea to compel you to climb steps or fall down them ! Was it snobbery, pretentiousness, or a relic of the days when a Norman Keep was entered in this way ? Mr. Clapp felt for

the bell, and rang it.

The good woman was opening the door, when Herr Schultze came hurrying down the stairs, an almost jovial Schultze.

“ My dear sir, delighted I am. So cold. Come and by the fire sit.”

A smiling Schultze helped Mr. Clapp off with his coat.

“ The music, you have it ? ”

Mr. Clapp had forgotten the music, for his music was in the air, an incredible to other mortals.

“ I leave the music to you. I'll sing in the chorus.”

“ Vienna Nights, my dear sir, hey ! No petticoats, I'm afraid.”

They went upstairs where Adolph was tootling on his flute in front of the fire. The table was laid. There were bottles and glasses on the sideboard. Adolph got up and bowed, holding his flute like a fencing foil across his thighs.

“ Welcome, Herr Clapp.”

“ I have to congratulate you on a birthday.”

“ Birthdays are becoming a bore.”

“ Are you so old as all that ? ”

They laughed. Herr Otto pointed towards the bottles with his flute.

“ A good uncle sent me a case of wine.”

“ Good uncle indeed,” said Mr. Clapp, rubbing his hands.

They sat down to supper. The good lady of the house had done her best, and given them pea soup, then steak and onions, the inevitable cabbage and mashed potatoes, but her cooking tasted like it smelt, of a tough, greasy greenness. The wine was of another order. They had sherry with their soup, good old dark sherry, and Mr. Clapp savoured it.

“ Your uncle, Herr Alder, has a nice taste in wine.”

The young men toasted him and each other. They were gay, forcefully gay, but Mr. Clapp had the feeling that this was a German feast, and that all the friendliness was a cloak of the dagger. The English were the good fool-dogs of the world, because they liked to trust people, and saw even in that wolf the Prussian, of a brother dog. Mr. Clapp sipped his sherry. Was it doctored ? He thought not.

Mr. Clapp let himself go. He was large, and animated and genial. Two glasses of sherry ? Well, yes, when it was such sherry. Herr Schultze apologized for the toughness of the steak.

“ It, like the old cow who cooked it is.”

Mr. Clapp guffawed. That was a great joke.

“ We English have good teeth, my friends.”

“ You need them.”

“ Even false teeth may be friends when the cook is English.”

The Germans applauded. This fat fool seemed to be travelling in the right direction.

Champagne ! Adolph opened the first bottle, and Mr. Clapp, on the alert, was consoled by the healthy popping of the cork, for a bottle that was so healthily up, could not have been doctored. Women and wine, what ! Mr. Clapp, to play the proper part in a bachelor show, told a smutty story, a very dirty story, and Mr. Clapp spluttered.

“ Oh, you boys, you’re as bright as the champagne.”

Adolph refilled Mr. Clapp’s glass.

“ That will help you digest the old cow.”

Mr. Clapp was vulgar.

“ In my stomach, and not on —— ”

“ Tsst,” said Schultze, “ naughty, naughty.”

Mr. Clapp pretended to look shocked.

“ Gentlemen, we are getting into the trough. Remember, we have Schubert before us.”

Schultze twiddled his glass.

“ Would you, Handel prefer ? ”

“ No, no, I’m not so terribly English. What did your great Goethe say when he was dying ? ”

“ Shake up the pillows ! ”

“ Sir, more light, more light.”

“ More wine, I think,” said Adolph.

He refilled Mr. Clapp’s glass.

The pudding arrived, suet and treacle. Herr Adolph, catching the good woman round the waist, insisted upon her drinking a glass of champagne. She simpered, wriggled and complied, and then Herr Adolph kissed her.

“ Look, look, the cook ! ”

“ In champagne swims.”

Mr. Clapp raised his glass.

“ Madam, to your bright eyes.”

The good lady giggled and was delighted.

“ You gentlemen must have your fun.”

“ Why not, Heart’s Delight ? ”

The landlady, pretending to be shocked, got herself out of the room, wiping her chin.

“ Even old —— ” said Adolph.

“ Ssh ! ” said Mr. Clapp, “ remember she has cooked us our dinner.”

The suet pudding demanded yet more champagne, and

Adolph opened a second bottle.

“ Wash it down, sir, wash it down.”

Mr. Clapp showed signs of becoming hilarious. Herr Schultze had provided dessert, oranges, dates and nuts. Mr. Clapp collected two oranges and juggled with them ; it was one of his parlour tricks, but when he tried to keep three orange balls moving instead of two, he broke down and one of the oranges rolled under the sofa. Adolph recovering it, and threw it at Mr. Clapp, who caught it and returning it hard and fast, hit Herr Adolph well and truly in the stomach.

“ Oof ! ”

“ Sorry, old chap, I hope it didn't hurt ? ”

Adolph picked up the orange, but this time he returned it to the dish.

“ That is not cricket, sir.”

“ No, my dear fellow, rounders.”

They finished the second bottle, and Mr. Clapp abandoned the table for the piano stool, and swinging to and fro, began to play one of Strauss' waltzes ! It was not a good piano, and Mr. Clapp's playing was wilfully eccentric ; also, he began to sing, and mooing to the music with emotional bravura. Herr Otto and Herr Adolph exchanged

glances behind his back.

“ The fat fool is getting properly cooked.”

Herr Schultze produced cigars, and Mr. Clapp's fingers fumbled in the box.

“ S'cuse me, my dear fellow, but these c'gars seem a bit skittish.”

“ Adolph, the cognac. A light, sir.”

Mr. Clapp seemed to find it difficult to make contact with the flame. He made a face at Herr Schultze.

“ No, you don't, my dear fellow ! You think I don't know you're wagging about it.”

Herr Schultze winked at him.

“ Now then, again try.”

Mr. Clapp got his cigar alight, and let his big hands rumbled over the piano. He produced some marvellous discords.

“ Wants tuning, my dear fellow.”

Adolph appeared at Mr. Clapp's shoulder with a glass of cognac, and Mr. Clapp eyes it jocosely.

“ My particular poison ! Yes, I shall fall.”

Mr. Clapp drank three glasses of cognac. He abandoned the music stool for the sofa, and reclining there like an oriental potentate drugged with hashish, covered himself

with cigar ash and splendour.

“ Sing, my dear fellow, sing. Harmony, harmony ! ” Herr Schultze sat down at the piano, and sang sentimental German songs, and Herr Alder accompanied him on the flute. Mr. Clapp waved his cigar languidly in the air, and lay staring at the ceiling. The Germans watched him with cynical amusement. The fat fool was nicely soused and unlikely to give trouble.

Mr. Clapp closed his eyes. His right arm hung down, and the stump of the cigar dropped from his fingers on to the carpet. Adolph picked it up and threw it into the fire. Herr Schultze sat motionless on the stool, observing their guest. Mr. Clapp's mouth fell open ; he began to snore.

Otto and Adolph looked at each other.

“ The pig will sleep for hours.”

They left Mr. Clapp there, and putting on coats and hats, slipped down the stairs. It was Adolph who descended to the lower regions, while Otto remained above with the bag and its grey powder.

Adolph saw the good lady, Mrs. Pert.

“ We are going out for a little air, darling. Leave the good gentleman alone. He is sleeping.”

“ I'm afraid, sir, you gave him —— ”

“ Oh, just a little too much wine. We'll take him home when we come back.”

II

MR. CLAPP opened one eye, and ceased from snoring. He had heard the front door close, if ever so gently. The gas was alight, the fire burning, the empty bottles still on the table. Mr. Clapp sat up, swung his legs off the sofa, and listened. Those damned Germans had undervalued his capacity for carrying his liquor. They had left him to sleep it off while they sneaked away on their scoundrelly adventure. Mr. Clapp stood up. Instead of being sozzled, he was in a state of stimulation, ready to be reckless, and to rage like an angry bull.

He opened the door, crept down the stairs, put on his hat and coat, and escaped. Caution was the thing, especially so on this dark and windy night. Mr. Clapp kept close to the walls and railings, eyes and ears alert as he made his way to the Painswick Road. The passage ? Yes, that was the place for him to make for ; he could slip over the wall into his own garden. Mr. Clapp had dressed himself with Uncle James' knuckle-duster ; he had a punch like the kick of a

horse.

The Painswick Road appeared to be deserted, and though Mr. Clapp did not know it, there were a couple of men squatting in one of the little front gardens. There were two more ensconced in one of the areas of Sussex Terrace. The wind snored in the tall elms. Mr. Clapp came to the mouth of the passage and sidled into it. He stood listening. From somewhere a faint shout smothered its way out into the night. It seemed to come from the darkness of No. 1. Mr. Clapp swung down the passage. He had not gone ten yards when a man challenged him in German.

“ Is that you, Heinrich ? ”

Mr. Clapp saw a dim figure and the greyness of a face. He did not stand upon ceremony. He swung his right fist, and smote that face, and the trombone player in the German band went down with a head that thudded on the passage paving. Mr. Clapp bent over him. This particular gentleman would give no trouble for a while. Mr. Clapp clambered over the garden wall. Obviously, since Schultze and Co. had put a guard upon the passage they too had climbed the garden wall to break into the house from the back. Mr. Clapp had left the garden roller just where he might need it, and mounting the stone cylinder he stood

and listened. There was one window high up in No. 1. which showed a light, and Mr. Clapp judged it to be a landing window.

He straddled the wall and let himself down into the Hyde garden, and prowled like a large and cautious animal across the little lawn towards the garden door. There might be another fellow on guard here, and Mr. Clapp's right fist was primed for another punch. He could see the door now ; it was shut and unguarded. Mr. Clapp put a hand to the handle, turned it and found the door unlocked. He opened it inch by inch, poked his head inside, looked and listened. An utter silence seemed to possess the house, a sinister silence, and the little passage was in semi-darkness. He sidled in, sat down on a step, removed his boots, and peeled off his overcoat. Then, like a big cat, he went up the stairs.

Silence. A gas-bracket was alight on the first landing. Mr. Clapp reached it, paused for a moment, and then took the second flight. A stair-tread creaked under his weight, inwardly he cursed it and stood still, but the silence held. On again to that second landing with stealthy, stalking-tread. He reached the landing, saw a half open door, and a room in which the gas was burning, but he saw

more than that, a man, half dressed, lying on a bed, trussed up with knotted sheets, and with something white stuffed into his mouth. Another man was sitting sideways on the bed, watching the trussed prisoner.

Hyde ! Mr. Clapp recognized the black eyebrows above the staring, frightened eyes, and the guardian was Adolph, pistol on knee, smirking at the man on the bed. Mr. Clapp recognised the back of Herr Alder's head, with its oiled and sleek black hair. Hyde was staring at Mr. Clapp with a fixity and an appeal that might warn Herr Adolph of some other presence, and Mr. Clapp took three great strides, one hand thrusting the door wide open, and other poised for the blow. Adolph Adler's head jerked round just as the fist flew forward, and the German took the blow upon the chin.

He fell back upon the bed, and the pistol dropped to the floor. Mr. Clapp kicked it aside, and picking up the stunned German, threw him into a corner. Then, he plucked the gag out of Hyde's mouth, bending close to him.

Hyde spoke with a smothering hoarseness.

" Quick. Cut me free. There's a razor on the dressing table."

Mr. Clapp grabbed the razor and slashed at the roped sheets.

“ Where’s Schultze ? ”

“ Upstairs. My God, they are setting the house a’light, and were leaving me to burn. Clapp, I owe you —— ”

“ We must get Schultze.”

“ He’s armed. He’s upstairs in my work-shop.”

The bonds were cut, and Hyde scrambled up and off the bed.

“ You had better watch that fellow, Hyde. Take his pistol. I am going up to get that scoundrel.”

“ He’s armed, Clapp.”

“ Never mind. I’ll get him.”

“ You take the revolver.”

“ No. I prefer my naked hands.”

Mr. Clapp was berserker. He left the scared and shaken Hyde to stand over the unconscious Adolph and going out on to the landing, looked upwards. A sudden flux of light poured into the well of the stairway, illumining the glass of the skylight in the roof, and striking a gleam from the black and polished hand-rail. Mr. Clapp sniffed the air. Fire ! He went swarming upwards on his stockinged feet, and as his head rose above the landing floor he saw a figure silhouetted and significantly black in the open doorway. The devil was watching his handiwork. Mr. Clapp

sprang upwards, with one hand on the rail. The banisters creaked beneath the weight of his pull. Schultze heard the sound and jerked round. His hand went up and his revolver spurted flame.

For a moment Mr. Clapp staggered like a man hit over the heart, then his big body lurched forward as Schultze fired again. But the schoolmaster's arms were round him. With the last spasm of strength left in him he heaved the German up, held him over the rail, and hurled him down. The staircase had a narrow central well, and Schultze, dropped from that upper landing, crashed on the stone floor of the basement passage forty feet below.

CHAPTER 31

ANN HYDE lay and looked at the slip of light between the curtains of her window. It might be a winter morning, but she had a feeling that the sun was shining. She lay happily relaxed, for a woman who, for the moment, had shed domestic duties, a nice Victorian phrase. What bliss not to have to get up and light fires in the iron mouths of those cold domestic gods, or to fry bacon, or make beds, or crawl around with dustpan and brush. Did any woman of sensitive texture really love these labours ? She was lying in a bed for the making of which she was not responsible, and she was to enjoy in it a breakfast which she would not cook. Blessed laziness ! And she had found a friend, someone who stood to her as a lay father-confessor, someone who was wise and humorous and human. Was she in love ? Oh, no, only happy, as a woman can be, in the consciousness of sensitive devotion. Strange, how you discovered such a spirit in the most unlikely of bodies, and associated with a name that might have pleased the vulgar comic press.

Someone knocked at the door.

“ Come in.”

The chambermaid entered, and crossed the room to draw the curtains and pull up the blind.

“ It’s a fine morning, m’am.”

She was a large, florid, kindly person in a mauve cotton frock, a comfortable person, and Ann’s face smiled from the pillow.

“ Frosty ? ”

“ Yes, m’am, but the sun’s shining. What will you take for breakfast ? ”

“ What is there ? ”

“ Eggs and bacon, sausages and bacon, haddock, kipper, or cold ‘am.”

“ I think, eggs and bacon.”

“ Tea or coffee, m’am ? ”

“ Tea, please. Is it giving you much trouble ? ”

“ Not a bit, m’am. I’ll order it, and William will bring it up. Would you like your dressing-gown ? ”

“ Yes, please. What is your name ? ”

“ Ethel, m’am.”

“ Thank you, Ethel.”

Ethel helped her on with her dressing-gown, and bustled out in her starched print frock. Add Hyde sat up, and piled the pillows behind her. What a gorgeous winter sun ! It

sent its light slanting into the room, and lit up the broad estuary of the immemorial Thames. There was a golden glittering track across the grey water. It traversed the black pier, and rested like a gentle hand upon the hollies and laurustines in the gardens below. The pier traddled out like a great caterpillar beginning its crawl across frost-grey vegetation to the dim coast of Kent. A milk-float jangled along the Royal Terrace, a cheerful sound. Milk'o ! The call seemed to symbolise the milk of human kindness.

Ann Hyde lay back on the pillows and dreamed. Sufficient unto the day was this peace and serenity. She could be herself, her other self, like one of those passing ships homeward or outward bound.

Came another knock at the door. Heavens, but she had forgotten her own child !

“ Yes ? ”

“ May I come in, mother ? ”

“ Come in, dear.”

Rachel appeared in slippers, nighty, and a little old pink shawl. She kissed her mother and sat on the bed.

“ What time is breakfast, mother ? ”

“ When you like, dear. I'm taking it here. William will

look after you."

"Who is William?"

"The waiter."

"I know, he's nice."

"You just go down to the coffee-room and choose what you please. Shy, dear?"

"No. George wants to take me on the pier. May I go?"

"Of course, dear."

When Rachel had gone, Ann Hyde lay and looked at the sky and the sea and the ascending winter sun climbing like the chariot of Apollo. Wonderful people the Greeks, and what a language! That which had been Greek and still was Greece had permeated the whole mind of man. The Isles of Greece, the Ionian Sea. Perhaps, that ship out yonder was voyaging to Corinth or Athens. She would like to go to Greece in the spring of the year when the snows had melted and the flowers had spread over the hillsides like coloured foam, and see Argos, and Olympia and Sparta, Delphi and the Parthenon. Perhaps John could be persuaded, if money came to them, to go with her to Greece. Had Josiah Clapp wandered in Greece or only through the pages of Thucydides? She hoped that John would not lose himself and his soul in this new material world like a crude boy

whose pocket-money has enlarged itself suddenly from sixpence to half a crown. Byron ! Was there not the same temperamental kinship between her husband and the poet, a passionate and rebellious vanity, a darkness of visage and of background, a creative restlessness ? Always, she thought of Byron as the dark prince, and almost as the Prince of Darkness. And she was tired, oh, so tired now that the consummations of their striving seemed to be actual. She had not realised how tired she was, how weary of watching and serving. She wanted someone to be kind to her, someone who would listen to her, someone who would wrap a rug around her on some great ship when the wind blew cold. She wanted to be thought for and considered instead of being the shadow of an urgent, self-centred child. John was so young, and the young tire and are fickle ; use you and cast you. Someone like that big, shy, awkward creature who had so consoling and galliard a spirit in an unromantic shell.

A knock, and William entered, with her breakfast tray. William had side-whiskers, a red nose, and kindly old eyes.

“ Your breakfast, madam.”

“ Thank you, William.”

“ Will you have it on a table or on the bed.”

“ On the bed, I think.”

Skilfully and with an air of old courtesy he deposited the tray upon her knees. Breakfast. How lovely ! And in bed.

“ Thank you, William. Look after my small daughter.”

“ I will, madam.”

Breakfast and blessed peace. She enjoyed every mouthful of it, for the old “ Royal ” was a comfortable hotel, and knew how to cook an English breakfast, and expected you to spread the butter thickly on your fresh warm toast. No dirty frying-pans here, for the eggs were as clean as milk, and the milk itself came from someone’s prize Alderneys. Oranges are not English fruit, but the marmalade was good English. Ann Hyde was in a mood to laugh happily at herself. What a little pig you are ! But was it piggery ? Why not enjoy the simple things ? Probably she was enjoying her breakfast more thoroughly than was her small daughter. So George was taking Rachel on the pier. She too would like to have walked on the pier, and feel the wind on her face and smell the sea, and feel the sway of it beneath a deck which did not rock. Yes, with someone to whom she could prattle intimately, and at ease, someone who would

listen, and in the spirit hold her hand. Josiah. Come, come, now, she was thinking too much of her new friend.

She had finished and was about to ring for the chamber-maid to take the tray away when she heard footsteps in the passage and a voice that said, "A telegram for you, m'am." She was conscious of her heart quickening its beat. Her sense of peace seemed suddenly to dissolve. She was afraid.

"Bring it in."

Ethel proffered the yellow envelope on a tray.

"Any answer, m'am?"

With a strange feeling of divined disaster, she slit the envelope with the handle of a teaspoon, unfolded the telegram and read:

Half Sussex Terrace in
ashes.

Am safe. Also Uncle James.
Expect me about eleven.

John.

She laid the piece of paper on the bed.

"No answer, Ethel."

“ I hope it isn't bad news, m'am ? ”

“ Our house has been burnt down.”

“ Dear, dear, I am sorry, m'am.”

Ethel took the tray away and gently closed the door, and poor Mr. Clapp's Cassandra sat up with her arms about her knees, staring big eyed at the sea. What did it all mean ? Had it been the work of those evil Germans ? John's creation would be among the ashes, but that was of no consequence, for steel was steel, and all his secret notes and plans were in safe keeping. Surely she should feel reassured ? The blow had been struck, and had failed. Now, what was there to fear ? Her husband's creation was beyond the malice of jealous men. That which had been built could be built again. And yet she was afraid. She shivered.

II

SHE had gone out to walk in the gardens of Royal Terrace, for though it was cold the sun was shining, and the hollies and laurels and laurustinus sheltered the broad walk which ran east and west along the cliff-top. She had left word at the hotel office, “ When my husband comes, tell him I shall be in the gardens ”. This broad and pleasant path

hedged with glabrous green led her to and fro, and seemed to spread for her a carpet for the footsteps of suspense. For, she was frightened, though the sun was shining.

She had turned at the eastern end of the broad walk when she saw John Hyde appear at the mouth of the little arch of hollies which enclosed the gate. He glanced up and down ; he saw her. He waved a hand, and came marching towards her, somehow triumphant and galliard, head in the air. The panoply of pride ! She should have been reassured, but a shadow seemed to lurk somewhere.

He came to her, ironic, smiling. He kissed her on the cheek.

“ Well, well, well, you’re a lucky woman to have a live husband. Those damned Germans tried to frizzle me.”

“ Has everything gone ? ”

“ Nothing that matters.”

“ Oh, my dear, but how —— ? ”

“ They broke in after dark, surprised me, and tied me up. I made a devil of a fight of it, but it was three to one. And I was to be left tied up to roast.”

“ What devils ! But how —— ? ”

“ Oh, poor fat old Clapp spoilt their game. He followed them in, knocked two of them out, and cut me free.”

“ How splendid ! And that horrible Schultze ? ”

“ Clapp threw him down the stairs and broke his neck.”

She looked frightened. This violence and horror shocked her.

“ And Mr. Clapp ? ”

“ Oh — old Mr. Clapp is dead.”

“ Dead ! ”

“ Yes, Schultze shot him, but before he collapsed and passed out, the old elephant tossed Schultze down the stairs.”

She stood wide eyed, staring. Her lips moved, but no words came from them.

This other man spoke of it as though Clapp spelt comedy. She turned away from him. She looked at a grey sea that had grown dim and cold. Vanity of vanities ! What a heartless thing was vanity !

"The Man Who Ran Away"

ESCAPE 2

Copy of Original Courtesy of
Sir Reginald Worthington

Two bored and idle men standing at a window in a Pall Mall club saw a large two-seater touring car pull up outside Cosser's the gunsmiths ~~across the way~~. The car was loaded up to the eyebrows, with the dickey like an open mouth stuffed with some green fruit that it ^{had been} ~~was~~ unable to swallow. It was the appearance of the car, not its presence outside Messrs. Cosser's that was sufficiently unusual to attract the attention of two old valetudinarians.

"Camping gear, what."

"Looks like it. Might be going to central Africa!"

A very large man in a grey flannel suit emerged from the car, and stood a moment looking across towards the Acropolis Club. He was hatless, and his hair was a lion's mane. His chin carried a pointed black beard. His tie was a cerise streak below this somewhat Spanish countenance. He held his head high with a suggestion of defiance, like some Spanish don or contemporary Quixote, save that there was no gentleness in his uncompromising countenance.

The younger of the two Quid Nuncs became excited. He grasped his friend's arm just above the elbow.

"By Jove, see who that is?"

"Who?"

"Magnal."

"Surely not. ^W Magnal - "

"Shave off that beard, and tidy up his hair, and put him in more professional togs."

"By gad, ^W I believe you're right. * Looks as though he were shaking off the dust. - Used to be a member here, wasn't he?"

"He was."

The man with the Spanish beard had disappeared into the gunsmith's, and the two clubmen stood watching. Here was a nice, savoury human grill dished up for their delectation.

"Funny case - that of Magnal's."

"If you ask me - I believe he was a much wronged man. It doesn't do for a fashionable physician to be too darned good looking."

"But the verdict [?] * ."

"I know. * Personally I believe both the women were lying. A case of ^{see} sue-spite. Magnal wouldn't be accommo-
dating and they put their claws ^{into} ~~to~~ him."

"I wonder!"

"Well - it messed him up properly, ~~defrocked him~~. ^W Looks as though he was cutting adrift. Hallo, * there he is."

The man reappeared carrying a gun-case. He swung it into the car, and stood looking across at the windows of his old club as though they were cynical and ironic eyes, and his mood was to defy them. The two members who were observing him, each had the feeling that the eyes in the swarthy face ^{were} ~~was~~ fixed on them.

"Head in air - it seems."

"Ajax defying the lightning!"

The large man swung the door open, slipped into the car, and drove off. A little puff of vapour shot out from the car's exhaust. Almost it was a defiance and a symbol.

"Well, & that's that. - What's the time?"

"Twenty to one."

"What about a glass of Sherry before lunch?"

I.

Medred Magnal first saw the Mistover country on an April morning. He had followed the old road from Melfont St. Giles, driving against a hungry north-east wind and under a blue sky swept clear of clouds, past Bareacus^{res} Farm and into the Mistbourne valley. Greenbury and Dead Man's Down piled themselves against the northern sky. Witch's Wood, its beech trees still black and wintry, lay in the hollow between these two vast tumuli of turf-clad chalk. Greenbury was greener than Dead Man's Down, a most strange hill, whose more brilliant colouring was matter for the mystics. Dewlap Pool lay upon it, and countrymen averred that the clouds and the mists trailed over Dead Man's Down to break and shed their moisture upon Greenbury. Barrow Hill with its fine tumuli tufted with trees, stood in the valley on the south east, and in the valley, a furlong from the dried up Mistbourne, lay the Mistover Long Barrow, with the grey Devil Stones sticking up like broken teeth out of the turf.

Magnal stopped his car, got out and looked about him. What a lovely and wild landscape was this, beyond the illusion of time, empty and grey-green under a primaeval sky, soundless save for the wind in the dead grasses. Neither man nor beast showed upon it, and no birds sang.

"Peace" thought Magnal, "if the present will not have me, I can possess the past."

For, as the club Quid Nuncs knew or should have known, ~~Medred~~ Magnal had another string to his bow. He was no mean archaeologist and had published a book upon "Some Wessex Hill Forts". The wilds of Africa needed no lure for him when Wild Wiltshire offered a sanctuary from the martyrdom of man. Magnal looked about him. The landscape was not quite empty, for on the ridge westwards the flint and thatch of Bareacres Farm seemed to focus the loneliness of the place, and just short of Ash Wood a white~~d~~ shepherd's shed on wheels told of the lambing season. Yes, there were sheep and lambs over there, and Tom Lavender and his dog, but they were very far away and like tiny shapes in a vast tapestry. Magnal filled and lit a pipe, climbing into the car to do so. Then he sat down in the rough grass and gazed and gazed, and his last glance rested upon Bareacres.

Mrs. Mary Wise of Bareacres was making butter, buttercup butter by its colour, though buttercups were not yet in flower, when the car stopped at the farm gate. Mrs. Wise was a downright and upright little person, with a shrewd brown eye, and a high colour, and she called to her husband who was washing out the churn in the backyard.

"Jack, there be a car at the gate."

Bareacres was a long, low house with the kitchen at one end, which had windows that looked both ways, and were useful for watching both the back and the front. On the yard side its thatch came within five feet of the ground, and on a dark winter night you had to walk clear of it or have your face scratched by the corn stalks. Mr. Wise came through from the yard, long and loose limbed and hairy, with faded light blue eyes, and an air of silence and of melancholy. Bareacres was Bareacres, a prairie farm, perpetually short of water, for it had to subsist on an indifferent well and two dew-ponds.

"Who be it?"

"You'd better go and see."

Mr. Wise was a slow mover, and his wife was for ever prompting him, and by the time John Wise had reached the porch door, the stranger was half way up the path. Mrs. Wise, having taken a peep at him, went, wiping her hands on her apron to reinforce her husband.

"Good morning," said the stranger.

"Good morning to 'ee," said Mr. Wise.

Magnal, seeing the lady of the house coming to join her husband, raised his hat to her, and then addressed himself to the man.

"Can I camp anywhere near here?"

"Camp?"

Mr. Wise had a trick of repeating his vis-a-vis' last word. It gave his slow brain time to cerebrate.

"Yes. - "

"Maybe you might."

"Down by the Long Barrow?"

"The Long Barrow."

Mrs. Wise butted in.

"We can't give permission for that. - That's Mistover property."

Mrs. Wise looked at the stranger with curiosity. He was a fine, upstanding man, but the stranger did not pay any attention to Mrs. Wise. He had looked at her once, and that seemed sufficient, and Mary Wise was a little piqued and puzzled. She was not accustomed to being ignored.

"I see. - But if I camped there would anyone object?"

"Object. & Well, I can't say, sir. All that there land's bin up for sale these fifteen years."

"There's the agents at Blenborough, Moss and Mag^Jwood," said Mrs. Wise, trying again.

The man with the black beard looked over the top of her head, which seemed discourteous, for it was quite a

comely head.

"Is there a village? Mistover's on the map."

"A village!"

Mr. Wise let out a bleat of amusement.

"Why, yes, there be a village, so to speak, but no one lives there."

"No one?"

"Well - there be 'ant no water, and neither man nor beast can do without water, sir, - even though there might be beer, hee-hee."

The man with the black beard looked sharply into Mr. Wise's pale eyes. A deserted village! What a peculiar coincidence!

"Is that so? Well I might risk a night's trespass."

"Trespass. - It's unhed down yonder. No one will worrit 'ee, sir. Will they, mother?"

Mrs. Wise nodded and was silent. Her bright brown eyes were busy appraising this peculiar gentleman.

"Then - I'll try it. † Supposing I were to stay for a few days could the lady fit me out with milk and butter, and eggs, and perhaps some bread?"

"Sure. - Y^{ou} could do that, mother?"

"I could," said his wife curtly, with a little frown on her face.

"Thank you. My name is Magnal. - I'll go down and look at the place."

He raised his hat, smiled at Mr. Wise, and returned to his car.

Mr. Wise and his wife watched him turn the car and drive off down the farm track. Mrs. Wise had her arms akimbo, and her lips pressed tight together.

"Queer gentleman - that."

"Queer, ~~W~~ mother?"

"Looking over the top of your head and talking as though you weren't there."

"Who, - me?"

His wife gave him a beady look. Her mate was not quick in the uptake.

"Wonder what he be. - One of they painter fellows by the look of him."

"Well, he spoke civil enough."

"Maybe he did," and Mrs. Wise returned to her butter.

The farm track brought Magnal and his car under the ^Ubalk of Five Barrow Down to the old road between Melfont St: Giles and Mistover. It had become no more than a trackway, its macadam overgrown with weeds and grass, for

no traffic passed between Melfont and Mistover. Magnal drove in second gear until he could see the Long Barrow lying like some sleeping leviathan in the valley below. The country was open, without ditches or hedges, and Magnal turned the car on to the turf and steered for the Long Barrow. The great hills, serene and grey, were all about him, sleek in the sunlight and unutterably calm.

He pulled up and got out, and strolled along the stone avenue to the barrow. It lay there just like some great, ^{primeval} ~~pre-animal~~ beast, sleeping in the sunshine, the stones of the peristalith still showing in places like grey ribs. He climbed it, and sat down on the crisp turf. What peace, what solitude, what a retreat for a man who was feeling bitter against humanity, ~~because his fellows had misjudged him and driven him into exile!~~ Magnal stroked his Spanish beard, and gazed up at Dead Man's Down and Greenbury, with Watch's Wood lying between them. In the foreground and below him ran what appeared to be a straggling, overgrown hedge of thorns, elder and yew. He got up and strolled down towards it, to discover that this leafy cleft contained the bed of the Mistbourne, the stream that had ceased from flowing these twenty years. It was as dry as a ditch in a droughty summer, the water-worn flints looking like stones

in an old trackway.

Magnal turned back and stood a'while, savouring this spacious scene. He felt its aloofness, its assuagement. He was alone with the dead, and ^{unruled} ~~inversed~~ by the living. Assuredly, chance had been kind to him. Yes, he would camp here, close to the Long Barrow and under its lee. He set about unloading the car, his tent, his camp-bed and sleeping-bag, his green canvas bath and collapsible chairs, his cases of stores, his Primus stove, his suit-cases. He put up the car's hood; the car could be used for additional storage. A new serenity came to him as he worked, hammering in tent-pegs and tightening guy-ropes, erecting his bed, his chairs and table. This little white pavilion was to be his home for a season, secure and aloof from the haunts of men.

What about lunch? He had a hunger, and a healthy hunger was one of the good things of life. He unpacked his canteen, spread his table, opened a tin of bully-beef and a bottle of beer. He had bread and cheese, oranges, nuts. It was warm in the tent out of the north-east wind, and the sun shone strongly. And when he had filled his belly, he lit a pipe and sat ^s ~~w~~smoking and meditating.

His thoughts turned to that hypothetical village,

Mistover. The farmer had assured him that there was such a place, though he had seen no sign of it in the wild landscape, which was strange. He got out his Ordnance Sheet and scanned it. Mistover was marked as lying north-east of the Long Barrow, and about half a mile from it up the valley. Well, why not go and explore?

Following the valley of the Mistbourne Magnal saw ahead of him what appeared to be a vast thicket of thorns and yews tangled up with briars and wild clematis, and looking like a great green mound against the blue of the northern sky. He bore towards it, seeing it as no more than a shaggy thicket from which a stag or a wild boar might have bolted in the days when the downlands were shared by the beasts. He had no suspicion of what he would find there, and he was within fifty yards of the thorns and yews when he paused and stood at gaze. Surely that object was a chimney-stack?

A narrow trackway of rabbit-nibbled turf led into this mysterious maze, and Magnal followed it with briars and brambles clawing at his clothes. This trackway once had been the village street, but nature had resumed possession of it. He came to the first cottage and stood staring at this ghost in grey stone. It was glassless, roofless, door-

less. Bushes and brambles and wild clematis smothered it like a spider's web. Two old apple trees ^{had} survived, though one of them had been blown against the building, and had poked its fingers through one of the empty windows. A rotting gate hung a'wry, and brambles spread like coils of barbed wire over the garden path.

To begin with Magnal supposed that this was no more than a solitary and derelict cottage, but when he pushed on further he was faced with other ruins, cottages, the crumbling facade of what had been a village shop. There were a score of such cottages, and as a climax he was shown a great, rambling farmhouse with its out-buildings, and ^a ~~fifty~~ ^{hundred} yards or so beyond a little stone chapel-of-ease with its roof intact and its bell hanging in the gable. A deserted village, smothered in this tangle of thorns! And why? The explanation was simple. In this downland country wells and streams could play strange tricks, and Mistover had died because water had deserted it.

Magnal pushed his way into the tangle about the farmhouse, and in the yard at the back of it he found the well. The winch and chain were there, and raising the wooden trap, he peered into the well. The steyning was dry and clean, disappearing into a circle of gloom. No glistening eye showed below. The well was waterless.

Magnal closed the wooden flap and stood head in air, savouring the strangeness of this strange place. He had seen other ruins, lost temples in the Indian jungle, forgotten cities in Africa, but somehow this English hamlet lost in its smother of wild growth moved him as those more spacious relics had not done. What a poignant, voiceless, Arcadian tragedy was this! Man had struggled with Nature, and Nature had laid a calm and inexorable hand upon the place and reclaimed it as hers.

He pushed his way into the house. It was a solid, comely building, and less ruinous than the cottages. Part of the roof still stood, as did most of the floor joists. The mullioned windows could be re-casemented. The oak stairs remained, and the flagged floors of the lower storey were as good as ever. What a pity that such a solid, English homestead should have lost its meaning! He wandered on to the Chapel of Ease. Two oak benches stood in its little porch. He sat down here, with the sunlight slanting in, sheltered from the wind. He could see grey headstones in a tangle of brambles; some of the stones were crooked; others had fallen.

He got up and strolled across to discover a most strange coincidence. He waded through the brambles and tried to decipher the names and inscriptions, but lichen

and the weather had blotted out most of them. One particular stone attracted him. It appeared larger and more imposing than its fellows. It had a skull, cross-bones and an hour-glass carved upon it. The lettering had been deeply chiselled and was legible.

He read - "Here lies John Magnal."

Well, of all the extraordinary tricks of chance!

He stood gazing at the headstone, and as he gazed the inspiration came to him. This dead village was for sale. Why should he not become its owner?

II.

Thirteen hundred acres for two thousand, three hundred pounds! The ruins of Mistover, Five Barrow Down, Greenbury, Witch Wood, Dead Man's Down, the Long Barrow, a mile of dried up brook! Magnal walked out of the estate agents' office at Blenborough with his hands in his pockets, and a little cynical smile on his face. All this was to be his, because a countryside lacked water, and an Urban World which cared not a damn about its farmers, had become parasitic upon Australia and Canada and Argentine and Denmark.

Magnal had interviewed both partners, and he had signed a contract, with the stipulation that he should be permitted to camp upon his prospective property while the lawyers were taking three months or so to complete a transaction that could have been finished in a week. Messrs. Moss and Maywood had been polite to him, but he had surprised an interchange of glances between them that had been slyly significant. Magnal! Of course! Even Blenbough had read his case in the papers. It had been a very juicy exhibit.

Said Mr. Moss to Mr. Maywood - "Must be the fellow. Fancy him turning up here."

Mr. Maywood had a reputation for piety.

"A most disgraceful case."

"A damned good looking chap. " I suppose the woman^e - "

"Yes, but a professional man ". Well, I must say he is doing the job thoroughly. " Going into retirement in a broken down, waterless place like that."

"Well, " I never thought we'd sell the property, even at that figure. Might as well buy an old brickfield. Suppose his money is all right."

"What else would it be? He's not got anything but ruins and a lot of starved grass."

So, ~~Mr.~~ Modred Magnal, ~~the outcast~~, drove back to Mistover and a solitary tent, a little white wedge jutting up in the vastness between the Long Barrow and the dead channel of the Mistbourne. The north east wind had passed and the great hills were sunning themselves and putting on caps of cloud-shadow. Magnal parked his car, set the Primus stove going, and strolled up on to the Long Barrow. If the gentlemen of Blenborough had no feeling for this lovely freedom, and saw in it nothing but ruins, lumps of chalk and starved grass, to Magnal it was a world of mystery and vivid interest. Starved grass - indeed! This sweet turf signified a clayless soil, grass upon chalk, and the junipers upon Dead Man's Down were so many little old men laughing at modernity. How often had he wished in his hectic Harley Street days, that he could withdraw into a

solitude such as this, and dig and explore. Had the Long Barrow ever been opened? There were no records of any such archaeological adventure. Well, he would explore it. He would be a dweller in a tent, and the world would class him as a harmless and eccentric nomad, not one of those tiresome people who set about creating something. The Official World, concerned mainly with the polishing of backsides, and issuing interminable decretals in vile English which no sane person could understand, or desired to, and whose natural doom should be the drain, dislikes the creators. The Rural District Council of Melfort St. Giles would not be interested in a solitary tent, but let a squatter dare to found something on the solid earth, and the little "Jack" would be after him. Magnal smiled as he remembered someone saying in a book "If the U.S.A. had possessed a Whitehall instead of a Washington there would have been no Middle West, no Wild West, no Covered Wagon, and that vast, creative urge would have died in the constipated bowels of the Civil Service.

But he remembered that this was a waterless land, and after tea he took the car and drove to Bareacres Farm. He had bought two large stone jars to hold water, and the supply would have to cover the needs of the inward and outward man. At Bareacres he found Mrs. Wise taking in her washing from the line in the orchard, where the starved old

^{lichenous}
 trees were ~~bickereous~~, and all blown towards the north-east
 by south-west gales. A high wind on the downs was a thing
 to be experienced. You could lean upon it.

Since no male creature was in evidence, Magnal was
 compelled to approach the lady. He was bare-headed, and
 had no hat to raise, but on this Spring day he felt less
 shy of this comely countrywoman. She seemed a part of the
 landscape, taking down her clean linen among those twisted
 trees. Moreover, Mary Wise was a warm-hearted little soul,
 and if her temper was quick it was because of her quick,
 high colour.

"Good afternoon, Mrs. Wise. * I'm afraid I am going
 to trouble you for some water."

Today he looked at her and smiled, and Mrs. Wise smiled
 back. Life up at Bareacres was not full of incident, and
 this gentleman with the black beard was pleasing to women.

"No trouble, sir, * but water is precious."

"Especially on washing-days."

She cocked her head at him like a thrush.

"Our poor old well has to be cossetted. - Are you
 wanting much, sir?"

"These two jars. I'll pay. * I can draw the water,
 if you will show me."

"No charge for water, sir. We be'nt that miserly."

"I'm sure you are not, but I would like to pay. - You see, we are going to be neighbours."

"Neighbours!"

"I am buying Mistover and the land round it."

Mrs. Wise opened her brown eyes very wide, and stood with a nightdress pendant in her hands.

"Bought it! * You mean, sir, you be going to live in that there tent?"

"For a while. I may buy a caravan."

"It be fearful cold here in winter, sir."

"I suppose it is."

"You ask my man or Tom the shepherd. - Even Gyppos don't come round here thieving in winter."

Mrs. Wise showed him the well. It was served by a wheezy force-pump with a fly-wheel, and as Magnal swung the handle he wondered why Bareacres had not had the water piped into the house. Lack of funds, most probably. The pump delivered the water into an open corrugated tank, which was three-quarters empty, and as an ex-physician Magnal doubted whether an analyst would have blessed these waters. He filled his gurgling jars by immersing them in the tank, and passing out with a jar in each hand, he met Mary Wise coming in with her washing-basket lodged on her hip.

"Do 'ee want any butter today, sir?"

"If you can spare half a pound. 4 I wonder if you could take bread for me?"

"I could. The baker he calls only twice a week."

"Shall I pay you now, or shall we make it a weekly account?"

"Just as you please, sir."

"Well, 4 weekly."

She glanced at his water-jars.

"Will 'ee be wanting that every day?"

"I hope not. 4 I shall have to make a dewpond for bath-water."

She gave him a rallying glance.

"They do say you town gentlemen have a bath twice a day."

Magnal looked amused.

"I plead guilty. But twice a week will have to do 4 here."

The sun went down in splendour, and Magnal, having supped, took his pipe, and sat on the broad back of the Long Barrow. He had changed into shirt and shorts, and sitting there with his great black head he might have been Neolithic or Bronze Age man. The ancient dead slept beneath him, if no one had rifled the barrow, and thrown

out the poor bones. A little, evening breeze had risen, and as Magnal sat there surveying the high hills, either amber or black in the sunset, he became aware of a strange, sighing sound. It came and went, and it made him think of the wind blowing into the barrels of a gun. With head cocked he listened to this mysterious murmur. Whence came it, and how was it created? Rising he walked up and down the great hog-backed mound, and in the evening light he saw four rude stones or slabs sunk in the soil. He bent down and explored the crevice with his hand. * Yes, this was one of those rare specimens, a singing barrow, and somewhere in the earthy carcass must be a second orifice connecting with this ancient organ-pipe. But the purpose of this stone chimney was obvious; down it had been poured libations or mystic food for the noble dead.

Magnal was sitting there like some great god Pan, black against the red sunset when a young wastrell from Melfont St. Giles, who was half poacher, half nit-wit, coming with a pocketful of snares to Five Barrow Down, sighted that solitary tent, and suffered the instinctive reaction of the unpoliced Anglo-Saxon, the impulse to steal. Descending into the valley and creeping up under cover of the Mistbourne bushes Mr. Sydney Sharp crawled up a green gully towards the

tent. His eyes were fixed upon it, and he did not see the man upon the Long Barrow. Mr. Sharp was half inside the tent when a terrible voice fell upon him. Mr. Sharp turned his head and saw upon that haunted mound what appeared to be a wild and semi-naked figure black against the red glow. The lout scrambled up and fled.

The figure on the barrow sprang down and gave chase, and Magnal's long legs were too swift for Mr. Sharp's rickety and miserable pair. Mr. Sharp heard the ogre bellowing at him in some strange language, for Magnal, entering into the humour of the incident, shouted at the lout in German.

"Come here, you thriving swinehound."

Mr. Sharp's physique was not equal to the contest. He was overtaken. He fell, and turning over like a fawning ^{cur}cat, put his paws in the air.

"I didn't mean no harm, mister."

Magnal stood over him.

"Get up, you fool, and walk like a man. - If ever I catch you here again -."

The lout scrambled up and fled, nor did he pause and look back until he had reached the old trackway. The wild man was back on the barrow, a strange figure which appeared to be lifting its arms to the setting sun, and making slow

and solemn movements as though engaged in some mysterious ritual.

"Crikey," said Mr. Sharp, rubbing a dirty hand across a moist forehead, "come 'ere agin with him about! Not likely."

And he didn't.

It was during the second week in May that Magnal, having purchased a pick, spade and shovel and a wheelbarrow in Blenborough and carted them homewards, began work upon the Long Barrow. It took him two days to open up the gallery, and to discover that the stone closing it was still in place. So, the sacred chamber had not been rifled. When he had prised the guardian slab aside, and switched on his torch he found himself in an ap^dpidal chamber with little bays opening from it, all walled and roofed with slabs of stone. The light of the torch played upon the relics of these ancient dead, a pot, a little heap of charcoal, two stone axes, a bronze dagger, and a crumbling pile of bones. The stillness was supreme, but as he stood gazing upon these relics he became aware of that strange sighing like the soft moaning of a wind blowing through a keyhole.

So, the Barrow had music of its own. Almost, the sound was human. It sent a shiver down his spine. He gazed at

the yellow skull and the crumbling whiteness on the floor. A strange excitement possessed him. He kneeled down and getting the pot shone the light of his torch into it. The thing contained flint arrowheads, a piece of amber and three blue beads.

Ye Gods, blue beads! The heritage of Egypt! He carried the precious pot and the bronze dagger out into the sunlight, and sitting down on the turf, spread a handkerchief, and emptied the contents of the pot on to it. Here was a discovery to aggravate the experts, and set them learnedly wrangling, for Magnal was sufficiently the expert to know that his discoveries did not tally with prevalent opinion. Bronze was not found in Long Barrows, or should not be so found without upsetting theories, which - of course - was blasphemy. The stone axes were in order, and the pot was not a Beaker, but Magnal was in a mood to laugh at the very erudite and their theories, theories that might be more sacred than the solemn dead.

He examined the dagger. It was short and broad in the blade, and the handle had been cast with it. The wood of the handle had rotted, but the rivets were there. This - no doubt - was a ritual dagger, and not a weapon of war. He returned the beads and the amber and the arrow heads to the pot, and re-entering the Barrow, took the skull into

his two hands and carried it out into the light. Was it the brain case of a long-head or a round-head? His impression was that it was meso-cephalic, and like the rest of his discoveries, somewhat contradictory.

~~Magnal had not the mercenary mind. Life was the thing, and the way in which you chose to interpret it. Nor was he interested in the squabbles of the erudite. And how some of these learned gentlemen loathed each other!~~ He had discovered some very interesting facts which appeared to be mixed in their periods, and all this data would have to be carefully recorded. Meanwhile, he returned the skull and the pot to their sanctuary and ~~flashed~~ his torch in a salute.

"There, my friend, the savants shall not savage you. Sleep safely, and if your spirit still wanders in the high hills, let it speak to me."

Magnal slept with the flap of the tent open, for he liked to see the sky and the stars, and now that the north-east wind had given place to westerly breezes, he had turned his tent so that the opening faced the east. Life had become very simple for him, simple and austere, and he kept to the country clock, sunrise and sunset. The sun, coming up over distant Thornbury, looked in upon him and his

camp bed. There were no wolves to be feared, and any vagrant prowler would be no more dangerous than ^{some} ~~that~~ half-witted poacher from Melfont St. Giles.

On this particular night something peculiar happened. Magnal had fallen asleep and was dreaming, and his dream was that he stood in the burial chamber of the Long Barrow, holding a lighted candle, and that some invisible mouth blew out the candle, and that some ghost hand touched him on the shoulder. He awoke. He found himself staring at the opening in the canvas. The triangle of sky was there, and so was something else. It had the shape of a human body, but the stars shone through it like burrs of silver.

Magnal started up in bed.

"Hallo! Who is the - ?"

Then, there was nothing but the stars, an emptiness, leaving - not fear - but a wondering void. Had this strange sense-impression been the after-shadow of his dream, or had that transparent shape been actual? Magnal slipped out of his sleeping-bag and went to stand barefooted on the dew-drenched turf. He looked about him, listened. There was nothing but a great silence, the stars and the dim heave of the hills. Not a grass-blade moved, but Magnal seemed to feel a presence, and a presence that was friendly.

III.

A resplendant morning in May.

Magnal was sitting on the Long Barrow with a note-book on his knee, and the skull of that ancient worthy lying on the green grass at his feet. He had been taking measurements and was recording them, and had raised his head to look at Five Barrow Down and its tufts of trees, when he saw a human figure coming from the valley of the Mistbourne.

It ran, loose limbed and shambling. It waved its arms; it shouted. Its obvious excitement seemed to speak in those semaphoring arms and flaunting legs. It was Farmer Wise of Bareacres.

"The bourne's broke. * It's flowing. Would 'ee believe it?"

Magnal sat very still, his eyes on that floundering, excited figure. Mr. John Wise arrived hairy and panting, to pull up suddenly and stare with his mild, sheep's eyes at the thing lying on the grass.

"Lord love 'ee, * where did 'ee find that?"

Magnal could not help smiling. He pointed with his pencil to the mouth of the open gallery.

"In there, Mr. Wise. * It belonged to the old fellow who was buried there. And I'm putting it back."

Mr. Wise was hatless, and his fair hair and his round

eyes suggested that he was shock-headed in more senses than one.

"Gosh, you ^{did} dig he up? * Maybe - that's what did it. It be an ^{unholy} ~~inbred~~ place this. + Don't 'ee put he back again."

Mr. Wise found a rather dirty handkerchief and wiped his forehead.

"All of a muck sweat I be, and no wonder."

"What were you saying about the brook?"

"It's broke, * after all these years, * and in May too. It's a marvel. * It's running by my yard. * My chap comes to me and says - he says * "Master, the bourne's flowing," and I says to him * "Be you sober or drunk, * Jack Harrison?" "Come and look" says he, "I'm as sober as you be."

Magnal was more than interested. He shared in this countryman's excitement, for Nature, in her strange, mysterious and puckish way could still confound man, in spite of all his complacency and cleverness. Magnal put his notes aside, and throwing his coat over the skull, got up to investigate this marvel.

"It's down to your farm already, Mr. Wise?"

"It be. * I reckon you've brought us luck, sir."

"And myself! * Let's go and look down there."

Magnal was smiling, partly at Mr. Wise's lingo, with its ye's and yous, its be and is, and all its picturesque parodies of grammar, but also he was smiling at the thought that the contract for the purchase of the property was signed, and that Mistoover might have ceased from being waterless. How ^{would} ~~amazed~~ those Estate Agents would be! He went legging it beside John Wise down to wild growth which marked the course of the bourne. Mr. Wise dived into it, pushing branches aside with his simian arms. He let out a shout.

"Just 'ee look, sir. - I never did see such a thing. " Laughing at us - it be."

Magnal hustled through, and looking down saw the glitter of water, * laughing water sliding along amid the dry old weeds and grasses. Brooks are supposed to prattle, and the Mistbourne was more than prattling. It chuckled. "Thought I was done for, did you? Not a bit of it." The old water-worn pebbles seemed to be blinking with astonishment. The dead herbage swayed and rustled. The rubbish of years came floating down on the swirl of the young water.

Mr. Wise's astonishment remained unappeased.

"Well - I be danged! * I've heard of they breaking in winter. Winterbourne, sir, * but to do it in May! It's a fair marvel. * My ole woman won't have to worrit about

washing days."

"Water for stock too Mr. ~~Wise~~."

"Sure-ly! * Say, sir, " what did 'ee pay for the property?"

Magnal told him, and Mr. Wise let out a chuckle.

~~"Gosh, sir, they'll be feeling sick in the stomach."~~

So fascinated were they by this strange water-break that they pursued it up the valley to trace it to its source. Mr. Wise said that in the old days the Mistbourne had begun as a spring in the Stoneton valley about two miles above Mistover. It had flowed through the meadows of Lammas Farm, skirted the Mistover cottage gardens, threaded the valley past Bareacres to joint the Melfont north of the Melfont-Camden-Tracy road. Mr. Wise was still provoked to think in terms of the miraculous, for the Downland Country is neither Fleet Street nor Tottenham Court Road. Rumour had it that the Long Barrow was a place of magic, either black or white. Magnal had opened the barrow, and the Mistbourne had come alive.

"Maybe you let something out, sir."

"Maybe - I did. * And if I did it does not appear to be an evil spirit."

"Blessed if I wouldn't call the brook the Magbourne."

"Not a bad idea, Mr. Wise."

They were close to Mistover itself, and suddenly Magnal remembered the dry wells. Had the same miraculous thing happened to them? He spoke of it to the farmer, and they turned aside towards the track. The Mistover thorns were in full flower and smelling very sweet, and Mr. Wise, sniffing the air like a dog, said that in his opinion there was only one smell sweeter than the May blossom, and that was the scent of a bean field in flower.

Coming to Lammas farmhouse they pushed through the tangle of growth and took the shortest 'cut to the yard, which was through the house. Magnal raised the well-flap, and both their heads were bent over the dark circle, and there far below them they saw a dim reflection as in a round mirror. The well held water.

"Dang it", said Mr. Wise, "if this don't beat me! Have 'ee had a look before, sir?"

"Yes, and the well was empty."

"Let's see how much water she holds."

The rusty chain was lapped round the winch, and with much creaking Mr. Wise lowered it until the ^{on}slacking of the links warned them that the chain had touched bottom. The farmer set the winch turning, and when the wet metal appeared he drew the chain right out of the well, trailed it along the flagstones of the yard, and paced it out.

"Fifteen feet o' water! Well I'm danged! Maybe our well will do the same."

Mr. Wise stood scratching his head as though to stimulate it towards arriving at an explanation. How the devil had it come about that the chalk, which had been miserly for twenty years, had suddenly become water-bearing, and had filled both the wells and the brook? Mr. Wise was very much danged. His pale blue glance wandered up to the sky and the ragged thatch of the house.

"Why, * now you come to think of it, sir, this 'ere house could come to life again."

Magnal too was gazing at the stout walls and the mullioned windows.

"So it could, Mr. Wise."

"There weren't a better farm for twenty miles around. * Give he new thatch and doors and windows, and a bit of new plaster and some floor boards, and there you be, snug as a bug."

"In foul weather."

"I tell 'ee it can be foul on these 'ere downs."

Peace, most profoundly so, and midsummer weather. Magnal, having explored the Long Barrow and reclosed it, took to beating the bounds of his new estate Five Barrow

Hall, Greenbury with its dewpond, Dead Man's Down, all were his, as were Mistover village and the blessed beeches of Witch's Wood. The vender, through his agents, had supplied him with an old, large scale estate map, and Magnal, having studied it, realised that his boundaries - as realities - were somewhat vague. No one would question Greenbury or Five Barrow Down but where the grassy slopes melted into the valleys, landmarks were indefinite, so Magnal spent a week with his map and a chartered surveyor from Blenborough, driving in white pegs which he proposed to replace with boundary stones. The surveyor was a very junior partner, and appeared to be in awe of Modred Magnal. So this was the bold fellow who had played high-tiddle-I-ti with the ladies in London, and got himself defrocked for it! The young man was secretly admiring and a little envious, and was polite to the hidalgo with the Spanish beard. There were a damned lot of old Pharisees in the world, including his senior in the estate and surveying business.

"Going to farm, sir?"

Magnal liked the youngster and he was not liking humans.

"No, " archaeologise. The dead may be more interesting than the living, and less - ."

"Lousy, sir."

"You have said it."

The resurrection of the Mistbourne and a heat wave were not without their effects upon Magnal's habits. The rebel in him was tempted to go native, and if he was to live as a primitive among the more primitive dead, why not assume a naked naturalness? Wash and be clean. He could not wash in Jordan, for the Mistbourne was a shallow and innocent brook, but his green canvas bath was at his service, and Magnal, having dug out a dipping pool, carried up water twice daily and bathed with lone publicity. Nor were towels needed. To dry himself and for the joy of the flesh he lay naked on the Long Barrow, or ran round it like Adam. Humanity had no legal right to come within a mile of this nude show, and if any prudish snooper should trespass upon his property and assume moral indignation, well - let it be so. Mr. Wise did indeed surprise his new neighbour in this natural state, without even a fig-leaf, and Mr. Wise looked coy over it and appeared embarrassed until Magnal had slipped on a pair of shorts.

"Bin bathing, sir, * I see."

"Just - sun bathing. Ever tried it?"

Mr. Wise let out a self-conscious guffaw.

"Well, you see, sir, * I be a married man. * Might be a bit awk'ard up at Bareacres. It be'nt exactly a place for bare asses: if you'll excuse me."

Magnal laughed. He liked this countryman's candour.

"I sometimes have a feeling, Mr. Wise, that humbug began with the cult of clothes."

"Maybe so, sir. If old father Adam had had that there garden to hisself & ."

"Exactly. & It is a strange thing how man came to be ashamed of his own poor body."

Mr. Wise, returning to Bareacres, broke into sudden strange guffawings during supper. It was as though he had become aware of some procrastinating joke. His wife looked at him in surprise and with some disapproval. Husbands should not be permitted to chuckle and choke & solus.

"What's all this spluttering about, John? & Something funny?"

Mr. Wise looked coy.

"Not for 'ee, Mary."

"Is that so? & Some dirty story you heard last market day."

Her husband repelled the accusation, and filled his mouth with dumpling.

"It be'nt nothing of the kind, but it be'nt for ladies."

This reticence was sufficient to set Mary Wise's curiosity off in full cry.

"Not for ladies, & indeed! & Then - it can't be fit

for a respectable married man to splutter over."

"Now, Mary, & it be nothing at all."

"Well, you're a nice fool to laugh at nothing at all."

Mr. Wise ate more dumpling, and then he winked at his wife.

"Why, it only be about our Mr. Magnal. & He takes his bath, and then he runs around stark naked."

Mrs. Wise pretended to be shocked.

"I don't see anything to laugh at in that."

This negative attitude set Mr. Wise off again.

"Hee-hee, & just like Adam in the Garden of Eden. Don't you go snooping around, Mary."

Mrs. Wise fluffed up her feathers.

"What do you think I am? I don't see anything to laugh at, John Wise."

"Don't 'ee - now! Well, Mr. Magnal, he brought the water, and dang it - he can run naked into Melfont & for all I care. He may be a bit strange, mother, but dang it, what about the water in your darned old well?"

Space

If Modred Magnal's cult of the nude was part of his mood of defiance, he carried that black bearded ^{lantern} ~~lantern~~ with him on those rare occasions when he took the car out and went shopping in Blenborough. A less highly tempered man might have changed his name, and become Brown or Smith. Magnal persisted in remaining Magnal. He opened a banking account in that name at Blenborough. He arranged to have his letters held for him at the post office until he should choose to collect them. ~~Society had played him a dirty trick, and he was not going to hang his head and assume guilt by looking guilty.~~

~~The wise might have said that a man with a name such as his was doomed to eccentricity, but Magnal was liking this separative life. In the London world he had been the slave of success, and now that he was a self-constituted outcast he could sit and think, and observe nature and use his hands. He had begun to map out his estate, and to mark down the sites suitable for exploration. This downland country was infinitely rich in its archaeological possibilities, and Magnal was no amateur out for curios and loot. There were pit-dwellings and earthworks on Dead Man's Down, tumuli galore, a hypothetical Roaman road. As a lone excavator there was work to occupy him for years.~~

But ~~Medred~~ Magnal was man, and man in his more subtle reactions. He might be sick of society and its hypocrisies, and content for the time being to live as a defiant outlaw, but ever and again a secret fear would steal into his consciousness. Maybe it was fear because he feared it, the dread of boredom, the elemental urge to rub noses with his fellow humans. ~~Would he come to lust after women? But that was a desire that his very defiance stood to ignore, and life had taught him that sex can be dormant when there is no petticoat to provoke it. He had the sky, the hills, the sun, the moon and the stars, hard labour, healthy hunger, peaceful sleep, and yet deep down in him a little voice might whisper like some~~ ^Uparling brat,

"Be quit, ^eyou little fool."

For, what might the little primitive self in him desire? Human contacts, and with what? Simple souls, who, in ten minutes would have emptied the little that was in them? The sound of the human voice? Well, the human voice could be ^esilly and unlovely when compared with the wind in the grasses and the song of the lark. Children? God forbid! Should not the Other Self be able to transcend the ~~paling~~ primitive? Meditation, vision, that serenity of spirit which divines the ultimate reality, and can behold through the steam of the senses God and His mystic movements.

IV.

In Blenborough Magnal bought a second-hand caravan, quite a super-caravan in its way, complete with bed-sitting room and a minute kitchen. It reminded him of the interior of a yacht, and promised more protection against rough weather. The local garage fitted his car with the necessary gadget to connect up with the caravan's drawbar, and while the work was being done he wandered round Blenborough and bought additional stores and equipment, blankets, sheets, more crockery, a five gallon drum of paraffin, a wheelbarrow, two saws, an axe and a bill-hook. Robinson Crusoe might have smiled over the selection, for, as a dweller on a desert island, Magnal had much to learn.

Granted that his god was consistency, and he a self-constituted hermit, the primaeval world to which he had withdrawn had been no empty world. These green hills had teemed with men. Their trackways had given out soft-pedalled thunder under their chariot-wheels and their multitudinous feet. Their flocks had grazed on the grassy slopes and in the valleys. Corn had grown on their lynchets. Many of the knolls that were now green had been brilliant white mounds of chalk to guide them. They had gathered to the sacred metropolis of Avebury, and recorded the sun's light and the succession of the seasons, and perhaps lit

Beltane fires, on Silbury Hill.

~~Magnal's first voyage with the caravan in tow was something of an adventure. He set out to tour Blenborough and collect his purchases, but he fouled the pavement in Garman Row, got into a jam in Vine Street, and was cautioned and helped out by the police. As a man grows older he may become more cunning in concealing his ignorance, and less crude in cherishing his complacency, and this business of getting the caravan out of the narrow streets of Blenborough persuaded Magnal to self-criticism instead of to cursings.~~

Assuredly, he had much to learn, and no one to whom he could tell a story, and who would say "How clever of you". Was every man a Peter Pan, secretly separative and selfish, yet asking for an audience before whom he could strut and crow? - "See, - what - I - have done!" Such hungry vanity suggested that you were lovely, and not so sure of your consistency as you wished to be. And loveliness can be a ghost, standing at man's elbow, and tempting him to consort with anything on legs.

Then came the ^{day}~~day~~, how, why or whence remained a mystery. Its advent was as fortuitous and casual as those other happenings which were to follow with an almost biblical simplicity that cloaked the cunning of God.

And God said, "I have chosen thee to be my new Adam,

and thou shalt go out into the wilderness *."

And God said * "Let there be - dog."

Magnal was smoking a pipe after tea, sitting on a cushion outside his tent when he saw that grey black speck moving upon Greenbury. The sky was overcast, with a presage of rain, and the great downs had the colour of thunder. Magnal watched the beast with vague curiosity. He supposed that it might be somebody's sheep-dog gone errant in the cause of romance, and yet the creature's approach had a purposeful directness. It trotted down into the valley, disappearing and reappearing between the green billows of the grassland. It came to the Mistbourne and vanished, - but a moment or two later its shaggy head rose above the bushes. It stood at ²gaze, and then it trotted on towards man and his affairs.

Magnal was interested, and more than interested.

"Bareacres Farm, my lad. * I suppose that's it. Love calls you."

Again the dog paused and stood at ²gaze about fifty yards from the tent. Magnal made no sign, nor did he call to the creature. Let Nature have its way. The dog came on again and straight towards him, a mongrel animal with some heritage of the sheep-dog in its make-up. Its pink tongue was hanging out; its dark eyes seemed to laugh amid

its hair. Magnal's tea-tray was close at hand. He reached for a lump of sugar; he sat with both hands extended. The dog came on, slowly, deliberately, its eyes on the man. When about three yards away it stood, with palpitating tongue, and gazed into his face.

"Hallo, ~~an~~ old fellow."

The creature had beautiful eyes.

"Have a lump of sugar?"

It came to him. It licked his hand, and not the hand that held the lure. Magnal's large paw rested upon its head. The dog lay down contentedly at his feet.

The significance of the invasion spread itself over a series of days. That night the dog slept in the caravan, and in the morning Magnal half expected to find him gone. He woke in his bunk to discover the beast sitting beside his bed and watching him.

"Hallo, old man, still here?"

The dog licked his face.

"Well, well, well, ~~4~~ I thought it was a love affair."

And so it was.

Back went the shaggy head; the dog's eyes laughed as he gave out that challenging bark.

"Come out, master, come out. ~~4~~ There are wonderful things to do."

Magnal rose, bent down, took the dog's head between his hands and looked into those guileless eyes.

"Are you God's messenger?"

A stumpy tail thudded on the floor.

Magnal rolled up the legs of his sky blue pyjamas, leaped from the caravan and ran. The dog sprang after him. Thrice they circled the long barrow, and then Magnal grabbed his bucket, and went down to the Mistbourne for bath-water. He had built a little dam of stones and dug out a shallow pool where the downland water gathered in crystal clarity. Back they went to the summer steading. Magnal filled his canvas bath, stripped and sponged himself, and the dog sat on his haunches, watching.

Three days went by, and the dog was his shadow. No one claimed him. He was eating Magnal's biscuits and sharing his ration of meat. And wherever Magnal went the dog went, asking no questions, but contentedly so, as though to be with man was life.

On the fourth day Magnal took his devotee on to the crest of the Long Barrow. He squatted down there, and the dog sat on his haunches opposite him. Almost he seemed to understand that some ritual was in progress. Magnal put out a hand, and made a mystic sign over the dog's head.

"I christen thee Good Dog Friday, and for short - Bob."

The dog smiled at him.

"Shake a paw, let us swear friendship."

Bob put up a paw, and Magnal held it.

"Brother man salutes brother dog."

So, the ^{car}~~chariot~~ travelled into Blenborough, and Bob sat in his master's seat while Magnal went shopping. A dog-licence was taken out, a collar purchased, and a store of dog-biscuits laid in. When Magnal returned to the car, which he had parked in the market place, he produced to Bob the receipt for his licence.

"Now - you exist, my lad. * If Mr. Pettifog does not use a rubber stamp - nothing exists. * I wonder what they would do about God?"

Bob laughed, and licked the tip of Magnal's nose.

That night it began to rain. The sky had been working up to what Magnal described as "Henley Weather", wind, greyness, the river ruffled lead, poplars chattering, thin and melancholy music coming from some players' punt. The English summer had decided that Mr. Modred Magnal needed educating, a fellow who had the impudence to assume that England was the Velt or California. ~~My~~ It would show him! It rained, and went on raining; it blew his tent down upon an oil-stove that was attempting eggs and bacon. It howled and spat, and flattened the grasses, and gave the

fool who washed so ridiculously a kind of perpetual shower-bath. It split the chariot's hood. It demonstrated the fact that the English summer could behave like a wild cat to the too credulous camper. ^{But} But one thing it did do, it discouraged the flies, and ^{Beetle-bug} Beezlebug who had become too prevalent, was blown elsewhere.

Magnal, drying his clothes in the caravan with the help of an oil stove, looked at the reeking ~~milk~~ window.

"Something will have to be done about this, my lad."

Bob thumped the floor with his tail.

Summer steading - indeed! And what of the winter? Even the philosophers of the neolithic age had sheltered in pit-dwellings protected by solid banks of earth. No canvas and ply-wood for them upon those tempestuous hills! When the wind blew in full force over Dead Man's Down you could lean against it as you might lean against the chest of a wrestler with whom you were at grips. But surely your Super-Self should be able to cope with the wildness of the weather? Hardy is as hardy lives. Where was his scorn for a soft generation whose legs were degenerating, and who ran and complained to Mother whenever life was rude to it? Magnal tapped Bob on the nose, and laughed.

"You and I, my lad, may be second Adams, but Adam was spared an English winter. This will have to be thought about."

Looking through the doorway of the caravan his glance fell upon that mighty mound of foliage which was Mistover. It spread there like a green umbrella. So thick and solid grew the thorns that though their tops might tremble they formed a live thatch. There, in the thick of the thorns were those solid stone cottages, roofless and windowless it was true, but no longer waterless. How strange that any habitation should be waterless in a land where the clouds wept as copiously as Niobe!

"Eureka, 4 Bob! Does a wise dog understand Greek?"

Bob thumped the floor with his tail.

"Whatever you say and do are good, Master."

That evening the sky cleared with the suddenness of a woman's mood. Crevices of blue appeared; sunlight scattered itself, and the wet grasses glistened. The great hills seemed to smoke. Distant crests were edged with gold. Magnal took his long staff, and called to the dog.

"Come on. We'll look for a place in which to toast toes and noses this winter."

The evening sunlight spread over Mistover as they drew near to it, and all that greenness glistened and tossed the wetness from it in the face of the wind. Summer had been here and hastened the wild growth, and lengthened the bramble suckers so that they set snares for man's feet. Magnal, in

his stockings and shorts had to pay homage to nature, or be clawed. Here and there a wild rose, weighted down by the wind, had to be pushed aside in that narrow defile of living green. The place had a strange ^effect upon the dog. He went leaping ahead over bramble hoops as though this mysterious wilderness smelt of things to be hunted. Magnal ~~let him go, for a wise dog does not need checking like a child, and that was to be yet another omen. Magnal was to discover that this loving and faithful creature had one peculiarity, if such it could be called; Bob could not abide children, possibly because in his earlier life some of the little savages had been cruel to him.~~

Magnal waded on. He came to the first cottage with its ancient apple trees all a'w^ay. He paused and stood at ga^ze. What was it that he noticed here? A stillness; the sheltered, rain drenched sweetness of the place. The tangle of great thorns had pitched a pavilion here, and the wind was baffled, though it galloped overhead. Shelter! Why, of course! Maybe, the folk of Mistover had planted about the hamlet a ring fence of protecting thorns, and in the dead years the growth had spread. Even in winter when the leaves were off the matted feltwork of branches would break the blast and give to the place a comforting

tranquility.

Magnal heard Bob giving tongue. Now, what had the dog discovered? Some seedy tramp, or a wild cat, or an interesting rabbit-hole. Magnal waded on. He came to the farmhouse with its more spacious bulk, and before the rotting gate in the stone wall he saw Bob, head up, hailing the predestined home.

"Hallo, old man, like the look of it?"

Bob barked, and put his paws against the gate.

"A wise dog knows its own kennel, what?"

Magnal gave the gate a push, and the poor thing almost fell to pieces under his hand. Bob leaped over the wreckage, and Magnal followed him into an old courtyard garden waist high with weeds. A stone paved path, each flagstone outlined with green grass, led up to a stone porch. Magnal stood and surveyed the place. It was long and low and solid, with mullioned windows and one great central chimney-stack between two high-pitched gables. The roof had been of thatch and part of it still ^cplung to the battens and the rafters, shaggy and ragged, and pocketed with bird-holes. But this house was good English; it defied the weather, and looking back at Magnal seemed to say - "Roof me and glaze me, and light fires in me and I shall be as good as ever."

The oak door studded with smith's nails still hung in the porch, Good old door, stoutly doing its duty. He pushed his way through the tangle of growth to the walled and paved yard at the back. He looked down into the well which now held water. A big bread-oven jutted out like the base of a tower and still carried its semi-circular cap of roofing stones. The dog was nosing at the back door.

Man and dog entered. Two stone walls from which much of the plaster had fallen contained a broad passage which ran from back to front. Doorless doorways opened from it, one of them housing the base of an oak staircase. Magnal looked upwards into the massive shell. The oak joists were there, and even some of the floor boards, black and moist, but still - as he guessed - in good heart. He prodded the first floor joists with the point of his staff, and the timber sounded solid.

Bob was busy nosing around, and his master walked into the right-hand front room. It possessed a great open fireplace with the andirons still in situ on the stone hearth. It had been bespoiled of its floor-boards, but the joists were there. Magnal tried the stairs; they creaked but carried him up to a little landing of oak, and these upper rooms were still contained by walls of ^{lath}stud and plaster.

Through a hole in the thatch the great chimney-stack was visible like a squarish tower.

Bob, half way up the stairs, lolled a tongue and glimmered his eyes through a tangle of wet hair.

"Shall we or shall we not, Robert? Wag a tail for yes."

Bob wagged his tail.

Between tea and supper Magnal walked to Bareacres leaving Bob to guard the tent and caravan. The dog understood him, for when Magnal said - "No walk, - watch, lie down, old man," the dog pawed his way up the steps of the caravan and lay in the doorway with his nose in his paws. It was disappointing to be left behind, but a dog has his duties as well as man.

Magnal found Mr. Wise in the rickyard, examining the weights on the tarpaulin that covered a stack of oats. This stack was waiting for the thatcher and fine weather, and to Magnal it supplied the inspiration and the information that he needed.

"Going to thatch, Mr. Wise?"

"I be, when this danged weather makes up its mind about settling."

"Do you do your own thatching?"

"No, old Ben Carter of Melfont thatches for me, he and his two lads. Not easy to find good thatchers these

days. "Come in and have a glass o' beer, sir."

"Thanks, & I will. & I want your advice, Mr. Wise."

"You be welcome, sir."

"This rough weather has set me thinking."

"It'll do more than that, sir."

"I believe you. Could your thatchers put a new roof on Lammas?"

"Why, & sure. & Be you thinking of moving in?"

"Well, & Mr. Wise, a tent and a caravan don't seem to be adequate for a Wiltshire winter."

Mr. Wise swung his long arms as though to beat warmth into his body.

"Yer tent 'ud be blowed to bits, sir, and it might blow your caravan head over heels. - Why, if you've got a good roof over your head and some glass in the windows,"

"That's it. & When do you expect your thatchers?"

"Tomorrer if the weather holds."

"Could I have a talk with them."

"Why - sure."

The temper of the weather improved, and Magnal found the thatchers at work next morning in the Bareagres rick-yard. Mr. Carter senior was on the ladder, for he loved his craft, and was unwilling to pass too much of it to

his sons. He was laying the straw, it and the pegs and the twine being passed to him by one son, while the other worked up the straw on the ground. Mr. Ben Carter was a stout old man with a bald head, a tonsure of white hair, and very blue eyes. The knees of his corduroy trousers were tied with string.

Magnal stood for a minute watching the work before speaking to the old man up above.

"Mr. Carter."

"Sir."

The old thatcher had one of those gentle and solemn faces that seem to grow like old apples in the country. He waited, staring down at Magnal.

"I wonder if you could do some work for me?"

"Ricks, sir? It be a busy time."

"It must be. * There is no hurry. * It is a house, not a rick."

"Where be it, sir."

"The old farmhouse at Mistover."

Mr. Carter's blue eyes grew more round. He turned on the ladder and squatted on a rung.

"Lord bless us, * Lammas?"

"Yes. I am going to restore it."

"Why, * I thatched Lammas the last time she was thatched; twenty five years come Michaelmas."

"It must have been good thatch, Mr. Carter. Much of it is still there."

There was a pregnant silence. All three countrymen were looking hard at Magnal. Doubtless they had heard that this was the strange gentleman who had caused the Mistbourne to break.

"Going to live there, sir?"

"I hope so. - It's a lovely old house."

"It be that, sir."

"Much too good to be allowed to rot."

There was a kind of consenting murmur from all three men. Mr. Carter came down the ladder as though this was an occasion to plant your feet on the solid earth.

"There'd be nothing I'd like better, sir, than to thatch that house. - A lovely roof it had."

"Well, will you give it another, Mr. Carter?"

"I will that, sir, when I've got my contracts through. It ought to be done before the winter rains start, sir, and then there - ^{return} ~~equinoctial~~ winds."

"Can you get the straw?"

"I can, sir. # Mr. Wise - he might do the carting for ye."

"Splendid. * You might like to look at the old house?"

"That I should, sir. It's bin a sad place these twenty years."

"Sinful sad," said one of the sons; "why don't the folks in London give such places water?"

Magnal smiled at the son.

"Ah, why not? * The country vote isn't worth while."

"That's about the size of it, sir."

"Well, - Mr. Carter, if I pick you up in my car tomorrow and drive you to Mistover, what time would suit you?"

"Say ten o'clock, sir; - the lads can get on with the job."

V.

With Ben Carter sitting beside him, Magnal drove his car into the mound of the red berried thorns. The wild clematis was silver white with seed, the turf slippery after the rains, and this invasion of Mistover was almost a jungle journey. Brambles clawed at the car's hood, but Magnal managed to push through to the patch of open ground lying outside the Lammas wall.

"Ye'll have to do some clearing, sir, or half t' straw will be off the waggon."

"I shall, Mr. Carter, * but not too much. It is rather lovely, this wilderness."

They left the car and leaning against the flint wall of the derelict garden, and resting their arms on it, gazed at the old house. It was a ruin and yet not a ruin, but somehow suggesting a princely person returning from a pilgrimage in old and ragged clothes. Its glassless eyes might be blind, but they were not dead.

Said Mr. Carter, "Give she a new straw bonnet, and she'll wear it with the best."

Magnal felt at ease with this old countryman, and together they explored the interior of Lammas. Mr. Carter took out a clasp knife, and opening it prodded floor joists and the ends of the rafters where they rested on the bedding-

plate. He had found an old barrel in an outhouse, and carrying it up the stairs, used it to stand upon.

"Oak, sir. * I reckon they'd stand for another hundred years."

The old man was thorough. He went all over the house, or as much of it as he could reach without a ladder, while Magnal sat on the sill of an empty window, and considered the problem that lay before him. What a lovely game it would be to turn craftsman and try his hand at reconditioning the interior. Surely he was capable of putting down floors and improvising partitions where they were needed.

Mr. Carter was standing at the head of the stairs, taking a final look at the roof.

"We'd have to strip the old thatch, sir, * that what's left. I'd give she new battens."

"Money is no object, Mr. Carter."

"Then I'll do a lovely job, sir. I reckon I can start next week, if we can get the straw and the timber."

Almost, his rosy old face had a sheen. The craftsman in him was itching to get at the job.

"Where are the nearest timber merchants?"

"Bull of Blenborough, sir."

"Can you give me an idea of how much you will need?"

"I can, sir."

"And I shall want timber for floors. - What about windows?"

"Bulls are builders' merchants, sir. They can supply everything. Maybe - you'll be wanting labour."

Magnal stood up.

"I'd like to try my hand at the job, Mr. Carter. - What a jolly game, bringing this old house back to life."

"Why not, sir? I'll give ee a roof and Bull can give ee windows. With the old house weather-tight - you could cock-snook_sat the weather."

In the joyous urge to accomplish something, and in matching himself against strange material things a man may have no leisure to feel lonely. Moreover, this business was a race against the weather, and Magnal, having drawn out a plan of the house, became furiously active.

~~This was the ground plan and that of the upper floor.~~

Spence

Magnal drove into Blenborough, meeting on the road a waggon-load of straw for the new thatch, the waggon rolling rather like a ship in a swell over the old track, and with Mr. Wise's carter walking beside his horses. Magnal pulled aside to let the waggon pass. He had been up at five for three mornings, hacking at the brambles and the too tumultuous thorns to clear a way to Lammas house. At Blenborough a policeman on point duty directed him to Mr. Bull's, and to a man in search of architectural treasure Mr. Bull and his yard and store-sheds were a surprise and a challenge.

Mr. Bull might have stood for the part in a blue coat, white waistcoat, riding breeches and top-boots. He had a Wellingtonian nose and a high colour, a jocund eye, and complete candour. He, too, knew Lammas, and when Magnal had stated his needs, Mr. Bull took Magnal into his office, and offered him a glass of sherry.

"Good business, sir. Am I to understand that you want to tackle some of the job yourself."

"That's the idea, Mr. Bull. You may think me an insolent amateur."

"Well, I don't know about that, sir. A gentleman can do what he pleases, though the local Jacks may try to mess you about."

"The official world?"

"Exactly. But you are not building, you are restoring, and I don't quite see where they could push in, if you have a roof, and water, - and a respectable - earth-closet."

Mr. Bull's eyes twinkled. You could choose all Bumbledown by installing a superior earth-closet.

When two men take a liking to each other matters move smoothly. Mr. Bull was very much a person with a streak of originality, and a love for things that were old, and a house such as Lammas deserved what was old. Mr. Bull suggested that he should come over and measure up the house for the timber that would be needed, and give Mr. Magnal an estimate. Other fittings would be required. Mr. Bull refilled Magnal's glass, and his own, and sniffed the bouquet of the old wine like a gentleman.

"Old wine, sir, old houses, but not old women! - I'd like you to see my collection. ♣ You might like some of it for Lammas."

Mr. Bull was more than a builder and a builder's merchant. He loved old houses and old crafts, and the modern concrete pill-box was anathema to him. He took Magnal across his yard where the more mundane materials were stocked, and into a large building of white painted timber and slate. He opened the door with the gesture of a man proud of some rich treasure.

"Well, here you are, sir. Every darned bit of it hand-made. No ~~cheap~~ Scandinavian stuff for me."

Magnal was astonished. The place was a veritable museum, full of ironwork, lead, oak panelling, stone, Adam's mantles, grills, oak screens, casements, carved spandrels, doors. He stood and looked about him.

"By Jove, Mr. Bull, where did you get all this?"

"A hobby of mine, sir. Been collecting for years. When some fool wanted the new and pulled down the old, - I bought it."

"Is it for sale?"

"To the right people and the right places."

"Lammas fulfils that requirement."

"It does, sir."

"But do I?"

Mr. Bull chuckled.

"I think you do, sir."

Magnal wandered round, gazing at things and touching them.

"This makes me feel greedy, Mr. Bull."

"Have a look at this oak panelling, sir."

"Where did you get it?"

"Out of an old house that had been condemned at Stoneton. Three complete rooms."

"It would fit Lammas like a glove."

"It would, sir. And look at those casement frames and lattices. Just the thing."

"I should say so."

"Good old English - all of it."

"Will it break your heart to sell?"

"Not for a house like Lammas, sir."

Mr. Bull was as good as his word. He drove over next day to Mistover, and found Magnal hacking away at the tangled growth in the walled garden, and the Carter family swarming up above, stripping the old thatch. Mr. Bull and Ben Carter were old familiars; they understood and respected each other, and both loved the craft of good building.

"Well, ~~Mr~~ Ben, here's a job to your liking."

"It be, sir," said Mr. Carter from his ladder, "I laid the old thatch more than twenty years ago, and I'll be in - heaven - I hope before it needs another."

"You'll be there, Ben, sure enough."

"Thank 'ee, sir. - I do think of giving the ridge and the eaves my special plaiting. It looks lovely it do."

"Like the work you did at Kings Mead for me?"

"Yes, like that, sir."

Magnal and Mr. Bull inspected the house together. Mr. Bull had a note-book and a folding rule, and when he had taken a good look round, he began to measure up and set

down his figures. Did Mr. Magnal propose to keep the mair lay-out as it was? He did. Very good. So, when Ben Carter had given Lammas a new roof, and he - Mr. Bull - had provided it with new windows, the place would be weather-proof, but not exactly a habitation.

"You'll want floors, sir."

"Yes."

"The old joists are all right. They'll dry off with the roof on. * I suggest best tongued and grooved boards. Going to lay them yourself?"

"Try to. I may do some botching to begin with."

"You'll learn, sir. * I could lend you a carpenter for a few days, just to get you going, and I could lend you the ¹champs. * What about the panelling?"

"I would like that for the two main rooms and my bedroom."

"Good, ~ If I were you, sir, I'd put up good match-board on battens on the old partitions, and fix the panelling to it. Lath and plaster would be - "

"A bit beyond me."

"Well, it's a job by itself. * The "match" could be painted. Like old wainscote, you know."

Magnal was looking at a rusty duck-nest grate that had been left in one of the fireplaces.

"Ought one to be completely consistent, Mr. Bull?"

"Just how, sir?"

"Well, some of the modern grates may be ugly, but they are efficient."

"I get you, sir. Why not simple brick fireplaces with the fire on the hearth? & I could do it for you."

"Excellent idea. & I rather fancy a big open fireplace with ingle nooks and all the old gadgets, in my parlour."

"I could do that too for you, sir. & Then, there are such things as baths, a kitchen range, and plumbing."

Magnal laughed.

"Yes, all the benefits of civilization!"

On the seventh of October Magnal struck his tent, and towed the caravan up through the Mistover thorns and into the Lammas farmyard, though the latter part of the journey had to be reinforced by the Carter family when car and van stuck in a soft place. As a matter of fact the farm buildings, stables, barn, granary, waggon-shed and cow-house were in better repair than Lammas itself, for the walls were of flint, and the roofs of soft grey slates. Following Mr. Carter's advice, Magnal housed the van in the barn, for when the double doors were open the

caravan sat nicely on the old threshing-floor.

"Give 'ee more shelter, sir, till 'ee can move in.
I tell 'ee, it can blow up here."

It could.

For, this thatching business was to be a race with the weather. The glass was high, and the sky cloudless, and on these still and golden days the task was easy, but old Ben worked like a man looking over his shoulder for a cloud in the sky. Each day the house's yellow bonnet grew, and the open shell of it became a shelter. The back yard was full of straw. Lorries from Blenborough brought casements and lattices, and loads of timber. Mr. Bull's men were fitting the casements. The timber, battens, floorboards, matching, were stacked temporarily in the waggon shed. Mr. Bull advised Magnal to let the oak panelling remain in storage until he had a dry house into which he could move it. Brick fireplaces were being installed in the two front rooms, and a new range in the kitchen. The old privy in the backyard was presented with a new seat and a sanitary bucket.

Magnal made expeditions to Blenborough. He bought himself a bench, and a complete set of tools, nails, screws, and various fittings, paint, brushes, sandpaper. Other lorries arrived with coal and loads of logs. The old house

would need good fires to dry it out. The car lived in the coach-house next to the stables. Magnal proposed to turn the wash-house in the back yard into a temporary workshop.

Maybe, he was a little conscious of himself as the eccentric amateur and of the curious glances of these English working men who must have wondered what this toff intended to do all by his bearded self in a house like Lammas. Probably, they decided that he was one of those artist fellows, just a little mad, and with his corduroy trousers and his colourful shirts he looked the part. They did not know him for the ex-physician, defrocked by the malice of two perjured women, but Mr. Bull knew, and concealed his knowledge. What the devil did a bit of scandal matter if a man was a man, had taste and could pay for it?

Said Magnal to him when the work was nearing completion -

"What about a cheque on account, Mr. Bull?"

"No hurry, sir."

"You have been a great help to me, and you don't know me from Adam."

"That's all right, sir."

Mr. Bull appeared to be absorbed in examining the brick-work of one of the new fireplaces, and somehow his air of detachment suggested a solid reticence. Magnal realised

that Mr. John Bull knew.

"I suppose you read the papers, Mr. Bull."

"I do, sir, - but I don't take too much notice of 'em."

"Then, probably, you read of my case?"

"I may have done, sir, - but - ."

"As a matter of fact the ladies were lying."

"They do, sir."

And that was all that passed on the subject between these two men.

So, Magnal continued to clear away weeds and undergrowth until such a time as he should be alone with Lammis, and the old house should be his. He was loving the prospect of playing the part of restorer, and of building himself in, secure against man and the weather. What an adventure was this, reshaping the vitals of this pleasant house, exercising his wits and his hands, feeling the old place grow warm and snug, and ready for its final garnishing. New thatch, new windows, clean, new floors, the blaze of the fires on the oak panelling, the winter winds defied, beer and wine in the old cellar, and a real country cellar at that. All sorts of developments were cropping up and challenging him. He would begin with candles, go on to lamps, and end with an electric light plant of his own. He would instal an engine and a pump, and welcome the craft of the plumber.

One front room should be his parlour, the other his library and museum. He was full of male conceit. Lammas should know no woman.

Late, on one October afternoon, he and Bob climbed Greenbury, and sitting on the grass above the dewpond, looked down upon their domain. Witch's Wood was beginning to blaze; the Long Barrow sleeked itself in the autumn sunlight. The thorns of Mistover were turning yellow, and in the midst of them Lammas' new thatch shone like a corn-stalk bonnet. A twinkle of light came from the new windows. Beyond the farm the high pitched roof of the Chapel of Ease sounded a more sombre note. Bob had snuggled close to his master, and lay with his muzzle on Magnal's knee. The sky was so serene that Magnal mistrusted it. It was like the false, smiling face of woman.

"Well, Dog Friday, our little world is ready for us. Man-man and man-dog, and no bitch within ^{two} five miles."

Bob thumped the turf with his tail, as though he applauded the coarse candour of a celibate philosophy.

Down yonder old Ben was finishing off the last plaiting and pegging along the eaves. This straw hem was like lace on a lady's petticoat. Ben was climbing rather stiff-kneed

down the ladder, conscious of a crook in his old back,
when Magnal and the dog came through into the yard.

"Well, # Ben, & finished?"

"I have, sir."

He stood back to look at his work, and his face was
happy.

"Do 'ee like it, sir?"

"You have done a lovely job, Ben."

The old man smiled at him.

"Thank 'ee, sir. Let the winds blow and the rain drive,
and she'll laugh - she will - at the weather."

VI.

The wind did blow.

The yellow leaves were scudding from the thorns like a swirl of gold pieces, largesse to the dying year.

Magnal had knocked off work to light a pipe and to look out of his parlour window. He was alone and loving it. Lattices might rattle and chimneys snore, but the old house stood like a rock amid those rolling trees.

Turning to gaze upwards the shell of the house swelled above him, striped with floor-joists and crowned by the battens and the thatching of the roof. Almost it suggested a mediaeval hall, and for a day Magnal had been tempted to treat it as such, but the coming of the wind had chastened such extravagance. A house shaped like a barn could be a draughty place, and a ship that sailed these Wiltshire uplands needed to be a snug vessel, with stout bulkheads, and taut rigging. Magnal saw Bob the dog trotting up the garden path, his hair blowing about his eyes. The dog seemed to think this floor laying a dull business, and Magnal had sent him out for a scamper on his own.

"Wow-wow," said Bob, and Magnal went to let him in. The heavy oak door of the porch had been cleaned down, and showed the silvery patina of old oak. It was a stately door and swung solidly and slowly on its strap hinges, which had been dosed with oil.

Magnal was working on the parlour floor, and half of it was in place, prime tongued and grooved boards whose whiteness contrasted with the darkness of the old joists. Tough stuff that oak and not too welcoming to nails, which were apt to bend unless hit truly and smartly on the head. Magnal had thrown a sack upon the floor for Bob's benefit, and the dog lay down on it and licked his paws.

Magnal knocked his pipe out in the fireplace, and resumed his nailing. The floor-boards were stacked in the broad passage which traversed the house from front to back, and Magnal sawed them to the right length there and poked them through the uprights that once had carried lath and plaster. His hammering echoed through the hollow house. As an amateur craftsman he was learning quickly, though a blood-blister on his left forefinger showed that a hammer-blow could go awry.

There was zest in this labour, for his urge was to get parlour and kitchen floored and walled before the winter weather fell upon the Downs. Three of the walls were of stone, and the only partition to be boarded up was that on the side of the passage. Then he would move to the first story, and the bedroom floors would form the ceilings of parlour and kitchen. With doors hung, and half the house draught-proof, he could settle in. At present he was

~~sleeping in the caravan.~~

So, the work went on, and Magnal's hands grew hard and somewhat those of a craftsman. He was ceasing to be a botcher, and he could look with pride upon all this nicely laid timber. He became expert in nailing battens to the walls to carry the panelling, using ^{four} ~~six~~-inch builder's nails. Cunning was needed to strike the hard old mortar between the stones. The weather was windy and wet, but not too cold. Once a day he took Bob for a scamper on the downs.

Magnal might be living like a primitive, but the simplest life makes claims upon man's time. He had to eat, sleep, wash. Water had to be heated, or drawn from the well. If he needed a hot meal he had to be his own chef. Then, there were all those darned things to wash up. Even a bath does not empty itself, and the earth-closet had to be remembered, or it advertised its presence too loudly. ~~Magnal may have~~ cursed some of these distractions, but he accepted them as inevitable. His cooking rarely transcended boiled or poached eggs, fried bacon or a Welsh rarebit. His stomach was strong, and with a hunger that was healthy, he could be satisfied with beer and bully beef and pickled onions, bread and cheese. He bought jam tarts and cakes and Swiss and sausage rolls in Blenborough. Oranges and apples and prunes and cream gave him his vitamins, though a furious interest

~~in some particular job may prove to be a potent vitalizer.~~

Mr. Bull of Blenborough, happening to be in Melfont St. Giles, drove on to Mistover, excusing a very human curiosity by assuming that it would be neighbourly to discover if Mr. Modred Magnal needed any expert advice, or was ready for the oak panelling. It was December at its dreariest, with hills and sky in one grey smother, and the earth as dead as Judas. Mr. Bull pulled up outside the garden gate and heaved himself out of his small car. He did not love cars, and in the old days he had covered the country on a horse. He saw that the garden had been tidied up. The porch door was open, and Mr. Bull walked up the path to the house.

Lammas possessed neither bell nor knocker, and Mr. Bull, having knocked on the door with his fist, and received no answer, walked in with a [~]sound "Hullo, are you in, sir?" There was silence, for, on this dim and bedraggled afternoon, Magnal had taken the dog out for a run, and was somewhere on the flanks of Dead Man's Down.

Mr. Bull walked in, and looked about him. He found both parlour and kitchen boxed in with timber, and the floors ~~been~~ laid in the rooms above. The broad passage was still cluttered up with floor-boards and battens. In the kitchen Mr. Bull found a candle stuck in a bottle and a paraffin

lamp suspended from a beam. Mr. Bull saw other things, a collection of unwashed crockery on an improvised table, an unlit stove, a bucket half full of water, a towel and two dishcloths hung up to dry upon a piece of string. On another improvised table half a loaf of bread, some butter, a bottle of beer, a tin of bully beef, and two enamelled plates suggested a camper's buffet.

Now, Mr. Bull was a comfortable soul, confident of going back to a good fire and a hot supper, an arm-chair and a Mrs. Bull who was also in an armchair. Mr. Bull found the scene strangely depressing. The house was cold and dreary. As a domestic display it gave him the shivers. Gosh, - what a bachelor show! How could a man like Magnal stomach it?

Mr. Bull felt for his pipe, filled and lit it, and in turning to throw the match into the brick fireplace saw that no fire had yet been kindled there. Ye gods, why this extreme austerity? This great stone house called out for fires to warm it, and dry out the damp of twenty years. It could not be that Mr. Magnal was hard up; his cheques were good, and his credit excellent. Had this modern hermit chosen to chasten the proud flesh? Mr. Bull pulled hard at his pipe, and said to himself that what Lammas needed was a woman. ~~about the place.~~

Woman!

Ha, that might be the snag! ~~It would appear that~~
~~Medred Magnal had been served scurvily by the sex, and in~~
~~rebellling against the conventions, had chosen to eliminate~~
~~all petticoats from his life.~~ Mr. Bull strolled out into
 the garden, pondering the problem. Well, anyway, Lammas
 was in no condition yet to accept women, had Magnal contem-
 plated tolerating a woman in the house, nor, as Mr. Bull
 realised, would such a domestic arrangement be comfortable
 for either party in this wild spot. It would be marriage
 or nothing, marriage or nothing, unless a man was fool
 enough to make a mistress of his cook.

"And then" thought Mr. Bull, "he would lose his cook."

Mr. Bull had reached the garden gate, and was wondering
 whether to wait or get into his car and go, when he heard
 the barking of a dog. Mr. Bull paused, faced about, and was
 persuaded to remain. A native and kindly curiosity might
 be humoured in such a situation.

Magnal and the dog entered Lammas by the back door and
 Magnal saw Mr. Bull's solid shape framed between the walls
 of the porch.

"Come in, Mr. Bull."

"Hope I'm not intruding, sir? - I was at Melfont, and
 I thought I'd drop in to see how you were getting on."

Magnal was smiling, but to Mr. Bull there seemed to be a certain grimness in his smile. It was part of that sharp black beard. Mr. Bull had the keen eyes of a man who employed labour and had to watch it for slackness or lack of conscience, and Mr. Bull gave Magnal one steady and considering stare. The gentleman looked thinner, hard bitten, ironic. It might be that his mood of defiance was beginning to take shape in the austerities of the flesh.

"Come in, Mr. Bull, and search for - bunglings."

"I did not come for that, sir. - Do you mind my pipe?"

"Not a bit. I'll join you."

Mr. Bull behaved as though he had not made a previous inspection of the house. He took off his hat, but failing to find a resting place for it, he carried it in his hand.

"You are getting on, sir."

"Not too badly. - Any criticisms?"

Mr. Bull looked around, and up and down.

"Quite a neat job, sir. Have you got the bedrooms covered in?"

"The two up above."

"No fires yet, sir. - The house could do with them, if you don't mind me saying so."

Magnal pushed a camp chair forward.

"Sit down, Mr. Bull. Can I make you some tea?"

"No, don't bother, sir. I have to get back - on

business."

He sat down on the green canvas chair. It creaked, and its complaining austerity emphasised Mr. Bull's feeling about this bachelor show.

"Wanting any more materials, sir?"

"Well, - you can recommend me - someone. ^u I'm going to furnish, bit by bit. Old things, you know."

"There's ^uStores at Blenborough, and Marden's at Camden Tracey. You'll find all you want there. - But why not a few fires, sir, ^u before you bring the stuff in?"

Magnal was leaning against and half sitting on his improvised table.

"I'm living hard, Mr. Bull."

"So - I see, sir."

"I made a vow that I wouldn't have a fire till Christmas. Then I'll blaze out ^u, the Yule Log idea."

Mr. Bull nodded.

"Do you want that panelling, sir? I'd get it up before you furnish. I could lend you a carpenter."

Magnal looked out of the window.

"Thanks. ^u A job for wet days. ^u Yes, send it along. I can fix it here and in my bedroom, and leave the library till later."

"It's rather an expert's job, sir. - How are you going to do it?"

"Screws. Sink the heads, and plug the heads with oak plugs. Can you find me any old oak pegs?"

"I can, sir."

"Good! Send them along with the panelling."

Mr. Bull's pipe was failing, and so, it seemed, was the conversation. Mr. Bull got up from that austere chair, went to knock his pipe out in the grate, and hesitated.

"All right. Knock it out, Mr. Bull."

"May I, sir?"

"Of course. It will join my Yule log."

The humour struck Mr. Bull as being a little sardonic, and as he turned his car and drove away, he was frowning through the windscreen. Now, just what was the impression that was flopping about in his hard old head? He had been talking to a man who was unhappy, and would not admit it, even to himself.

Magnal, having stained the floors of the parlour and the two bedrooms a good rich brown, remembered that there were such accessories as curtains, and linoleum for the kitchen floor. The weather was continuing mild, and a fortnight before Christmas he went shopping, with a long list in his pocket and Bob in the back seat. He began with Blenborough, and not with articles of virtue. Beds might be prosaic things, but Magnal played the Sybarite in his

buying of beds. Blankets, sheets, pillows and bolsters, and what not, followed. He asked to be shown materials for curtains, and having chosen a printed linen in purple and green on a white ground, he asked if these curtains could be made up for him. Why, yes, sir. His long list kept him an hour and a half in Blenborough's particular emporium. He bought toilet articles, a cottage tea-set, cutlery, spoons and forks, a bread pan, brushes, and even a carpet sweeper. Blenborough's carpets did not please him, and he refrained.

Mr. Stour^{ne}'s Antique Shop was his next haven, but he was in harbour there less than five minutes. Mr. Stour^{ne} was out, and the shop was in charge of a pin-nosed, cat-lipped young woman in spectacles. She was acidly refined, and shrewishly superior, though what claim she had to such virginal hauteur it would be difficult to say, As a physician Magnal had to suffer from such constipated souls, and after he had been twice corrected by her on technicalities upon which he was something of an expert, he wished her good-day, and walked out of the shop.

Marsden's of Camden Tracey was otherwise. It had rotund Georgian windows and an air. Old Mr. Marsden was present in person, a genial old gentleman who looked like a venerable prelate with a nice taste in port. His taste in old furniture, glass and china was catholic. Mr. Marsden

was a philosopher, hardened to the visits of ladies in search of bargains who might spend half an hour in his shop, and nothing else. Magnal having looked about him, and seen stuff that he coveted for such a homestead as Lammas, came quickly to the point.

"I am furnishing a house. - I rather think you can give me what I want."

Mr. Marsden responded with a little benevolent bow.

"I'll do my best, sir. - May I ask what type of house it is?"

Mr. Marsden happened to be Camden Tracey's antiquarian, and when he heard the names of Mistover and of Lammas, his round and benevolent face appeared to sprout cherub's wings. He too had heard of the breaking of the Mistbourne, and other things, and here was this colourful and rather mysterious gentleman present in his shop. Mr. Marsden began to enjoy himself, and not merely because he was selling old furniture. This Spanish Don had taste and manners. They began to ramble about Mr. Marsden's very extensive premises like a couple of intimate enthusiasts.

"It should be oak, sir, should it not?"

Oak it was to be, and oak was Mr. Marsden's speciality. Magnal chose a lovely Jacobean cupboard, a small dining table of the same date, two chests, an Elizabethan chair,

two coffin-stools, a gate-legged table, a dresser. And then they came to the four-poster bed.

"Dash it" said Magnal, "why didn't I see that before? I've bought beds."

"It is a lovely piece, sir, and I have had it fitted with a modern mattress."

Magnal bought the four-poster. After all, one of the modern editions could be put in store.

"You don't happen to have any Persian rugs, Mr. Marsden?"

"Oh, yes, sir, I have, sir."

"Splendid!"

Magnal bought his rugs, and he chose those in which soft blues and rose predominated as colours. He went on to glass and china, Waterford, Spode and Bristol.

"I shall owe you a nice bill, Mr. Marsden. Work it out, and I'll write you a cheque. I suppose you can deliver?"

"Oh, yes, sir. Might I suggest an early delivery. - if we should get - snow."

"Yes, that's an idea. My old village track is not too friendly even in the best of weather."

So, on the homeward journey Magnal changed his mind. He stopped at Melfont and rang up Mr. Bull. Could Mr. Bull arrange to erect the oak panelling for him in the parlour

and the front bedroom? He had furniture coming in and the delay might be awkward. Mr. Bull was helpful. He said that he would put his best carpenters on the job at once.

Within a week Mr. Bull's two men had the oak panelling in place, and Magnal, driving to Melfont, phoned to Mr. Marsden and gave him instructions to deliver his purchases. He also notified the emporium at Blenborough, fixing a particular day so that the two deliveries should not clash.

What a work was this! Magnal had cleared the passage so that the furniture could be carried in. Mr. Marsden's consignment was the first to arrive, and the business developed into the battle of the bed. Every trick had to be tried before the four-poster could be persuaded up the farmhouse stairs, but by now it stood in stately dignity in Magnal's bedroom. The Persian rugs were spread in parlour and bedroom, and the old oak pieces placed under Magnal's direction. He gave the men beer and largesse, and slept for the first time in his lordly bed.

On the next day Blenborough descended upon him, and gradually out of the confusion order reigned. Standing on an old packing-case Magnal hung his curtains. When dusk came he and Bob were alone in a new Lammas, or a half of Lammas. Parlour and bedroom were alive and colourful,

but the kitchen was still a confusion of crockery, glass and cutlery. Domestic problems crowded upon this bachelor world. "Where should ^{he} ~~they~~ store the linen? Why the devil had he not thought of cupboards? So, to begin with, the linen had to be stowed in the big Jacobean press, while the crockery etc. decorated corners of the kitchen. Articles that he could not deal with for the moment were bundled into the back bedroom.

Christmas Eve!

Magnal lit his first fire in the parlour. It was a celebration. Coal and logs were piled in the big open grate, and as the blaze grew, both Magnal and Bob spread themselves before it. Candles were alight in a candelabra which Magnal had bought from Mr. Marsden. Light, warmth, colour, old oak on the walls, old oak in the furniture. Magnal, kneeling by the fire, looked about him, poked Bob in the ribs, and felt house-proud.

"Well, here we are, my lad. And we have a cellar. Surely it's a champagne occasion."

It was, though the feast was an improvisation, cold tongue and pickles, Blenborough jam tart, cheese and Bath Oliver biscuits, oranges and Brazil nuts. Bob was given a helping of tongue, biscuits and two lumps of sugar. The

half bottle of champagne bubbled in Waterford glass.

Magnal made himself coffee. It was not very good coffee, but it served. He lit a pipe, turned the Elizabethan chair towards the fire, spread his legs to it, and felt warm and digestive. Bob lay on a Persian rug, and blinked at the Christmas fire.

"Well, here we are, my lad," said Magnal.

He was King of his Castle, and feeling warm both within and without. He could assure himself that there was so much to be done that he would have no leisure for loneliness. ~~Had the old cenobites of Egypt possessed such a~~ retreat as his, or so many interesting activities to challenge both hands and head? Always he had been a separatist and fastidious soul, and this new world was but a concentration of his prejudices. And what of the old world? Would he ever renew contact with it? Oh, possibly, when Lammas was complete. Some man-friend might be welcomed to this celebrate's sanctuary when Spring was in the air and the downland turf flowered and facile to the feet.

Magnal went to his four-poster, carrying a candle and followed by the dog. He was warm with wine and a proud and ironical conceit. Here was his world, and he was master of it. He did not envisage the puckishness

^{of a that}
~~of life, or that~~ fate might be smirking at him behind the
 curtains.

"So sure, are you, my friend? You think you can keep
 life out? Well, wait and see!"

VII.

The old year was dead, the new year born ^{during} in a spell of milk, ^d wet weather. Where was this fierce wolf, the Wiltshire winter? Magnal, driving to Bareacres for bread, milk, eggs and butter, rallied John Wise on the mildness of January.

The farmer looked pawky, and rubbed against his nose the bowl of the briar pipe Magnal had given him. Mrs. Wise had received a vanity bag, a box of choice handkerchiefs, and a carton of chocolates.

"Don't 'ee be in a hurry, sir, to make a joke of the weather. When January comes in green - I always reckon she goes out white."

"Six inches of snow, Mr. Wise."

"Maybe twelve. You get wood and coal in t' house, and fill all your buckets with water."

John Wise's advice might seem a little superfluous, but Magnal took it. He stacked wood and coal in the disused dairy, and laid in a store of tinned food, meat, fruit, milk, sardines, biscuits, and half a Stilton cheese. He bought hanging cupboards and a kitchen cabinet in Blenborough, and put the kitchen in order. He also purchased a hundred gallon galvanised tank, and installing it in the scullery, kept it filled with water. He arranged the new furniture in the back bedroom; some day it might

house a bachelor friend. The library was his immediate care; also the main passage. Having watched Mr. Bull's carpenters at work, he found himself making quite an efficient job of lining the library walls with the old oak panelling. Wainscoting would serve in the stone paved passage. His next part would be cast in the role of painter and decorator. He had a liking for sparrow's egg blue, and apple green. Lammas should be like some Henry the Third hunting-lodge or country house, gaily wainscoted and spangled with gold and silver stars.

With all this labour, Magnal's menus were prone to patchiness. There could be a sameness about soup cubes and cold bully beef, boiled eggs and confectioner's jam roll. There were days when he hungered after the flesh-pots of Egypt, roast sirloin and Yorkshire pudding, prime steak, a meal at Boulestin's or the Cheshire Cheese, even vulgar sausages and mash. It rained and it blew, and this blotting-paper weather was something of an anti-climax. He had been preparing for a siege, and assault by the Downland winter, and the weather was like a moist and p^uling brat whose napkin needed changing every three hours.

Damn it, why should he not drive into Blenborough, garage the car, and take the train to town? Nothing happened here. Nothing could happen here. But that would

mean leaving the dog all alone in the house. Yes, even a dog complicated life and made demands upon your ego. - Moreover, was he not being tempted of the devil? Had he not foreseen those hours when ghastly boredom might attack him, and try the strength and the patience of his philosophy, tempt him to go native, get drunk or pick up a tottie in Leicester Square? Was he so poor and wayward a creature that he could not bear to be alone? What of some poor devil locked up in a cell, with nothing to do but to pick oakum or his own nose? And had not the old monkish fellows suffered from the same sickness, and chastened it by sitting for half a day on a cold and pointed stone?

"Come on, my lad, let's walk."

Walk they did, mile upon mile, over Greenbury and Dead Man's Down and Five Barrow. It was one of those strange, hesitant, windless days when the weather - like some bleary old man - is in doubt ^{as to} which way to wander.

Magnal cut across close to Bareacres, and beyond a wire fence he saw the lumbering, loose legged figure of John Wise. The farmer was standing like a scarecrow in a field, or a hairy dog sniffing ^{at} the same interesting smell.

"Hullo, * Mr. Wise, * what of your winter?"

John Wise was facing north east. He took out a handkerchief and blew his nose.

"Change coming, sir."

"Think so?"

"Sure. I wouldn't mind layin' a bob on it. There'll be snow inside a week."

In his less crowded and successful days Magnal had kept a diary or Day Book, and coming across it, he sat down with it before the fire that evening, and glanced through its pages, and in doing so he discovered some passages that were pregnant with meaning.

"Do not suffer from the passion to please."

"Society is ready to applaud you if you can play the mountebank and dispell its boredom, but when it becomes bored with your tricks, it will kick you into the limbo of the forgotten."

"Nothing can be ^{more} fickle than the crowd, so the wise man may prefer a crowd of one."

Here, in truth, were the early confessions of a separatist, a person whom the cheerful eugenists might describe as an anti-social soul. Magnal browsed on, to come suddenly upon a quotation from a letter written to him by a certain famous Hindu sage who once had been his patient.

"Your negations provoke me, my friend. Do not seek to elude life or life will turn and pursue you. One

should not fear one's fellow man. Fear is a tiger that may come prowling to your door. Meet life with open hands and calm compassionate eyes, and it will become as your - dog."

Magnal pondered that passage.

"Well, Bob, my lad, is our Yog¹ right?"

Might there not be a streak of cowardice in evasion? Elude life and it will turn and rend you?

The morning brought a north-east wind, and with it a whip that provoked action. Mr. Wise's prophecy might prove true, and Magnal got out the car and drove to Blenborough. He left Bob at home in charge of the house, and that understanding and docile animal accepted the duty meekly. Why not try a new brand of tobacco, buy some fur-lined gloves, and a pork-pie, and lunch at Blenborough's principal inn? ~~Was this a sop to Cerberus, or a surrender to the challenge of the community, or just restlessness?~~ Magnal may have ~~burked the~~ answer to that question. ~~The very little may confound the very great, and a mere whimsy open the door to tragedy.~~

Magnal did not know or had forgotten that this was Blenborough's market-day. He found the car-park crowded, but the attendant managed to find him a place.

"Going to snow, sir, [^] I think."

The man's blue nose matched John Wise's forecast.

Magnal did his shopping, and it was disultory shopping, piled the various parcels in his car, and strolled across the market-place to the "Royal George". He drank a gin and bitters in a crowded and stuffy lounge ~~that smelt of agri-~~
~~culture~~, and in the dining-room he was placed at a table for two near the service door by an alcoholic head-waiter to whom Magnal was a stranger and less than nothing. The food was indifferent, the cooking more so. The Royal George chef might have done his damndest with Magnal's stomach, for he had the digestion of an ostrich, but half way through the meal the waiter added a bald and seedy looking gentleman to Magnal's table.

"You won't mind, sir? Very busy today."

Magnal did mind, but it seemed churlish to say so. The gentleman, who was a commercial traveller, took his seat; he looked wet and turgid, and he was so. He sneezed and he coughed and he blew his nose, and he coughed with such energy and impartiality that he coughed over everything, including Magnal.

"Excuse me, sir, Got a dreadful cold. - Put me in a damp bed last night."

He looked like a damp bed, and not a very clean one. He produced two aspirins from a vest pocket, and swallowed them with his soup. The ex-physician in Magnal was stimulated.

"If I were you I'd get into a warm bed as quickly as possible."

"I shall, sir."

"Feel shivery?"

"Yes, 'ot and cold."

"The sooner you get into that bed - the better."

His vis-a-vis continued to cough and sneeze, and when he had coughed over Magnal's fruit-salad, he lost interest in it. He rose and retired to the lounge to sample the Royal George's coffee. It proved to be like sweet mud, and Magnal having paid his bill, refilled his pipe and departed.

He found the north-east wind blowing a flurry of fine snow across Blenborough's market-square. The nose of the car-park attendant appeared even more blue.

"Thought there was snow coming, sir."

Magnal tipped him, turned up the collar of his overcoat, and started the engine. When he reached the open country, and lost the shelter of Blenborough and its trees, the snow was like dry silver sand eddying about the road. ~~in front of the car.~~ As yet it did not cake upon the windscreen, but at Melfont St. Giles the silver sand had become falling feathers, and so thickly so that the hills were blotted out. The snow was now packing on the screen and freezing there, and beyond Melfont Magnal had to stop

the car, and clear the screen by hand. Well, John Wise had been like his name in his forecast of the weather. Along the derelict road to Mistover he had to drive slowly into a white curtain and over a world that was white. Twice he had to stop and clear the screen. The Long Barrow looked like a huge snow-drift, and Mistover and its thorns a vast white umbrella. There was a strange, wild beauty in the scene, and the silent and stealthy ^{de}cent of the snow. Magnal got the car into the coach-house, and carried his purchases across the yard. He heard Bob barking, a welcoming sound in this white wilderness.

"Hallo, old man. Is the fire out?"

It was.

Magnal went back to the coachhouse, and emptied the car's radiator. It was going to freeze and freeze like the devil. The winter siege was on, and house struck cold. Still wearing his overcoat, he cleared the fireplace, re-made the fire, lit it and piled on logs and coal, ~~with the dog squatting beside him~~. There was plenty of fuel in the house, but he gave an hour to carrying in more kindling, coal and logs. He filled every bucket he had with water. He lit the kitchen stove and put the kettle on. Well, if they were to be snowed up, he had food and fuel for a month. If milk and bread failed he could call on his reserve of biscuits and tinned milk.

"Tea, my lad, " what!"

The house was warming up. Magnal got out his Wilton tea-set, and drew the gate-legged table close to the fire. He had lamp and candles ready. Why not buttered toast? He squatted with Bob in front of the blaze with a round of bread on the end of a knife.

There was a great silence over the house, and Magnal could picture the snowflakes falling over the high hills, and the thorns and the Lammass thatch, and muffling the world with white wool. Thank the gods he had made more than half the house snug and secure before this Downland winter had come in earnest. Bareacres would have to look to its sheep. The old grandfather clock ticked on, another purchase from Mr. Marsden's shop, and Bob, having lapped up his saucer of tea, lay down at his master's feet. Magnal lit a pipe and meditated. He had forgotten the gentleman with the explosive cold.

It was snowing hard when Magnal opened the porch door before turning in that night. He and Bob stood side by side and watched the white flakes sliding out of nothingness into the oblong patch of light. Already the snow lay two inches deep.

Magnal closed the heavy oak door and shot the bolts.

"We are going to be snowed up, my lad."

"
They were, but not quite as he imagined it.

When Magnal looked out of his bedroom window, the snow was still falling. Familiar outlines had vanished under this thick white pall. The thorns looked like great lumps of cotton wool. The flint wall was capped with snow, and all the outlines of the garden had disappeared. Magnal put on a sweater and a dressing gown over his pyjamas, and went down to let Bob out and light the fires.

After breakfast and a pipe before the parlour fire, he shovelled the snow from the door and cleared paths to the well, the wood-shed and the gate. The snow was coming down as thickly as ever, and this business of clearing paths and doorways would have to be repeated. The rest of the day's work would be done under cover, and he decided to tackle the other back bedroom and set up his wainscoting and board the attic floor. The room faced north, and was bitterly cold, and Magnal carried up his portable oil-stove and lit it.

He was busy all day with housework, keeping fires going and nailing up battens and wainscoting. He lunched on his pork pie, bread and cheese and beer. Snow was still falling, and before tea he put on his gum-boots and took the dog out for exercise. The snow was nine inches deep. Darkness came early, and after tea he lit his lamp and a pipe and sat down before the fire.

What was the matter with the tobacco? Was it the unfamiliar taste of the new brand he was trying? His throat felt dry and slightly irritable. By supper-time he became aware of a definite soreness, a pricking round the tonsils, and suddenly Magnal the man reverted to Magnal the physician. Damn it, had that wretched fellow at the "Royal George" passed him his cold? He went upstairs for his shaving mirror, and examined his throat by the light of the hanging lamp. Yes, there was a definite redness. - But, confound it, he could not afford to be laid up, alone in this isolated house. He mixed himself a stiff, hot whisky and soda, took two aspirins, put the oil stove to warm his bedroom, and decided to turn in early.

disturbed by He slept, but it was brittle sleep ~~into which the dis-~~
~~harmonies of the flesh obtruded themselves in the shape of~~
unpleasant dreams. The room was dark when he woke with a raw throat and an explosive headache. The diagnosis was obvious. The gentleman of the Royal George had presented him with a massive infection, with influenza as the probable pest. When he sat up in bed he felt giddy and sick. There were vaso-motor [~]charges down his spine. Most certainly he had a temperature.

What a situation! Maybe, he was just a little scared at the idea of being a sick man marooned in this lonely

house, and snowed up in it into the bargain. Something would have to be done, but what? He groped for matches and lit a candle, crawled out of bed, and put on his dressing-gown. The house felt most damnably cold. Well, firstly he would have to let the dog out, and give the beast his biscuits. He did so, and then made an effort to light the fire, but that pain in his head began to pulsate. Nausea. He was nearly sick over the hearthstone.

Bed was the thing - the only thing. He collected a jug of milk and some biscuits on a tray, also the whisky bottle. He struggled upstairs with them, and this time he actually was sick on the landing. He heard Bob barking outside the porch door. The poor beast had to be let in. He descended, still reeching, and opening the door, let Bob in and re-closed the door. He did remember not to lock it. Something in his bursting head said - "Don't lock doors."

Bob had gone to his biscuits, and Magnal struggled upstairs, put the tray on a chair beside his bed, and almost fell onto it. His head went down on the pillow. He was shivering. He pulled the clothes up and wallowed.

Vagely the voice was saying "Bed, bed's the only thing. Bed and starvation. You'll be better tomorrow."

VIII.

That unlocked porch door was to be his salvation.

Bob lay down on a rug at the foot of Magnal's bed, a patient animal, a little puzzled by his master's strange behaviour. Why go to bed at the dawn of the day instead of enjoying a romp in the snow? Bob became more and more a puzzled creature as the day wore on. A gradual restlessness took possession of him. He put his paws on Magnal's bed and whimpered, but the man he loved appeared to have become a strange, befuddled and almost comatose creature.

The dog grew frightened. He pawed at the man in the bed, and his master muttered at him.

"All right, - old man, got to sleep."

There was no light in the room now that the candle had ^{ed}burnt itself out. The dog went loloping down the stairs. The old clock was still ticking, but soon even that familiar sound would cease. Bob nosed about for his dish of biscuits, and crunched up a few pieces, but like his master, yet for other reasons, he had no stomach for his food. For a while he lay in front of the empty grate, staring at it, and giving little restless turns of the head. There was something very wrong with his world, - but what was it?

Bob left the parlour and re-climbed the stairs. He put his head round the door of the darkened room. His master was making strange noises, not man-talk, but a

peculiar prattle. And there were other noises, ~~and~~ a restlessness, a suggestion of some blind struggle going on; the bed-clothes were in confusion, the quilt trailing on the floor. Bob sidled up to the bed, wagged his tail, and let out an appealing whimper.

"I'm here, Master. ♡ What is the matter?"

Man muttered at him, ♡ delirious nonsense. A foot thrust itself from under the clothes. The dog was frightened. He put his fore-paws on the bed, and poked his muzzle close to Magnal's face. Again he whimpered. Man turned away with a toss of his burning body. Man did not seem to know his dog.

Fear took possession of Bob. Here was some terrible thing, but what? Something that a dog could not deal with. And yet in Bob's scared and bewildered soul there was the primitive instinct of the animal that divines peril and seeks to counter it. The dog fled downstairs and began to scratch and bite at the porch door, and since the door defied him, he took to barking, and his yelps seemed to translate themselves into a cry of ♡ "Help, ♡ help!"

Snow had ceased from falling, and the sky was cloudless, one of those brilliant ^{wintry} ~~water~~ skies covering a world that was exquisitely white.

A figure was passing along the old trackway, that of a

woman wearing a black mackintosh and an old black hat. Her shoes sank deeply into the snow, which was virgin here. One half frozen hand held a bag. She was biting at a slice of bread, and her face had a strange, dead look. She had come from the Bareacres rickyard, where she had slept in a cleft between two haystacks. Her feet trailed their pattern across the snow until she was opposite the Long Barrow, and then she stood still and looked about her. She looked back at Bareacres with a little spiral of smoke climbing from its distant chimney. She hesitated. A little tremor passed across her frozen face. This brilliant light seemed to confuse her, and yet she knew the outlines of these hills, for, many years ago Camden Tracey had been her home.

She turned away from Bareacres and its promise of warmth and food, and walked on stiffly, not lifting her feet, but shuffling through the snow. Her face was a haggard streak under her black hat, a dead face, resigned, empty. She was still eating her bread. Her grey eyes gazed at the white hills. Almost it seemed that the immense solitude called to her. She would go on till she could go no further, and then lie down to sleep her last sleep in the snow.

This wilderness, uncharted by any footsteps, would

be her Journey's End, for her mood was one of tired and frozen acquiescence, and it was by mere chance that she shuffled on towards the white mound that was Mistover. She came to the thicket of thorns canopied with snow, and wandering on, saw the first derelict cottage. She stood and stared at it in vague surprise. As a child she had visited this hamlet, but in those days Mistover had been alive. She wandered on and saw another ruined cottage. How strange! A deserted village, and somehow fitting for her explicit, and in sympathy with her mood of weary acquiescence.

Again she stood still. In the great silence an unexpected sound had come to her. A dog was howling.

Now, life and her fellow humans had not been kind to the woman, and had the cry for help been human it might not have moved ^{her} as did the voice of this dog. The creature's howling was broken now and again by a succession of short barks.

"Help, help, help!" She had been telling herself that she had finished with all emotion, but the wailing of this dog stirred in her a sudden, questioning ^uconfession. What did it mean? In the immense stillness the sound came to her with a kind of tragic ^{tremulousness}~~tremulousness~~, as though the beast was shut up in some building. She waded on, more and more conscious of the strangeness of the place, derelict

buildings, the tangle of old thorns crusted with snow, brilliant sunshine, a dog howling. So, she came to Lammas and saw it as a house that had a roof and windows, and was both dead and alive. There were no footprints in the snow, no smoke from the chimney. But she saw curtains and they were drawn.

"Help, help, help," and that urgent howling.

She turned towards the gate. It was clogged with snow, but she managed to push in and through. The hinges creaked, and there was sudden silence in the house as though the dog had heard the sound, and was listening for other sounds that promised rescue. She waded up the path to the porch, and knocked at the door.

"Is anyone there?"

She was answered by an instant whimpering and scratching at the door. For a moment she hesitated before touching the handle. What might she find in this strange house? Some tragedy? But the dog's whimperings and eager pawings decided her. She tried the door. It was not locked and it gave to her hand.

Stranger though she was she was greeted with a yelp of joy. The dog was on his hind legs, pawing at her. She put down her bag and bent to him, and he licked her face.

"What is it, old man? All alone?"

Bob was down on all fours. He gave three sharp barks and turning towards the passage, looked round at her as though asking her to follow. She understood. Someone was in this silent house and needed help, or someone was dead. For a second or two she hesitated, for, suddenly, she was afraid. Her hesitation troubled the dog. He came back and put his paws against her knees, and through the tangle of his hair his eyes were appealing.

She put a hand on his head.

"Yes, I'll come."

The dog turned and she followed. This strange and silent house was very dark, but some light came from an uncurtained window on the landing above. The dog had taken to the stairs, and half way up them he turned and looked at her again. She nodded at him. "I'm coming." She reached the landing and paused, her eyes on the half open door of a darkened room. The dog stood watching her, encouraging her with waggings of his stumpy tail. She could hear a sound as of laboured and anguished breathing. She walked on and into the room, drew back the curtains, turned about and looked.

The dog had his fore-paws on the bed. She saw the congested face, the glassy eyes, the labouring chest, the straining muscles in the neck. The bed-clothes were in disorder, the

quilt trailing. A glass of milk had been knocked off the bed-table, and broken glass and spilt milk patched the floor.

Man, desperately sick and alone here! She hesitated; she was afraid. Should she elude the crisis, go somewhere for help? But where? And had she the strength? She was half starved, half frozen.

The dog was watching her intently. He gave a sudden protesting bark.

"Help, woman, help!"

Some impulse made her raise her hands and remove the hat from her grey head. This simple act brought the dog from the bed. He seemed to understand. He came and put his paws against her body, and she bent and kissed his ^{nose.} head.

Light, warmth, food. If the house and the sick man and the dog needed them, so did she. Her first impulse, the impulse of a woman trained to nursing, was to reduce the disorder of Magnal's bed. The glassy eyes stared at her while she did it, seeing her perhaps as a strange and active shape, but nothing else. He muttered something, and raising an unsteady hand, pointed to his mouth. The lips were cracked and crusted.

Water? Of course! How long had he been lying here like this? She had come as a rescuer, she who herself was

in need of rescue, and as she hurried out to the landing she was moved to wonder whether any other person was lying desperately sick in this snow-bound house. She opened doors, to find one bedroom furnished, the other like a carpenter's shop. The dog followed her down the stairs and kept close to her heels while she groped about and drew curtains and let in the light. She heard him whimper.

"Poor dear, you must be starved."

She saw his biscuit dish and an empty pannikin on the parlour floor. Was there any food in this house, fuel, or water? She hurried to explore, and finding a loaf of bread and a knife on the kitchen table, she cut a slice, broke it in pieces and gave it to the dog. He nosed at it and whimpered. She tried another door and saw buckets of water and a cistern, and shelves stacked with tins, and a meat-safe. She went back for the dog's pannikin, filled it, and placed it on the kitchen floor. He lapped at it eagerly, and then fell ravenously upon the bread.

The cold of the old stone house was bitter. She tried another door, that of the old dairy, and saw all that she needed, kindling, coal, logs. In less than a minute she was kneeling in front of the kitchen grate, raking out the cinders. She found paper and a box of matches, and with hands that felt numb, she packed in the fuel, lit the paper,

and saw the flames spread.

Warmth! She held her hands to it, and with the warmth a strange new feeling of life came to her. She filled the kettle and put it on, and finding a jug of milk in the larder she emptied half of it into a small saucepan, and set it beside the kettle.

A sudden feeling of giddiness attacked her, and her knees shook. Almost, she was as much in need of food and drink as the man and dog. Again, she raided the larder and found cheese and butter and a half finished tin of corned beef, jam, marmalade. The kettle was singing, and she made tea, and sitting down, drank and ate. Was this just selfishness, the greeds of the flesh? It was not. "If she was to help here she needed strength. The hot tea and the food revived her, and pouring some of the warm milk into a cup, she carried it upstairs. Magnal's head turned on the pillow; his glazed but feverish eyes stared.

She bent over him, raised his head, and held the cup to his lips. His lips fumbled, and the milk ran down his beard. How silly of her not to foresee her problem.

"Wait. I'll fetch something else."

She hurried down, found a spare teapot on a shelf and returning, poured the milk into it, and held the spout to his lips, and this new vessel served. He had to pause now

and again, and lay panting, and she, who had helped to nurse such cases, was wise as to the nature of his illness. This was acute pneumonia, and his great peril was plain.

She stayed with him until he had finished the milk, and then she tried to get him up higher in the bed. She went down for cushions and tucked them in behind him. He looked at her with a sudden sanity, gratitude, puzzlement. His lips moved.

"Thanks W. How did you - ?"

She looked calm, austere.

"Mus'nt talk. - I heard the dog howling."

She left him looking easier, and more able to breathe. Her glance fell on the oil stove. No doubt it was empty and had burned itself out. She picked it up and passed out, and his eyes followed her like the eyes of a helpless and puzzled child. She carried the stove downstairs, cleaned the charred wick, found paraffin and filled the container. He needed warm air to breathe. His eyes were watching the door, and he saw her enter, kneel down and light the stove. Vaguely, he was wondering. Who was she? How had she come? But her strange presence was blessed and assuaging. Dimly he was conscious of the inherent urge to live.

She went below and lit the parlour fire. The house grew warmer and so did her feeling for life. She collected

her bag, took off her mackintosh and hung it on a peg in the kitchen, and happening to glance at her hands she saw that they were dirty after all this lighting of fires. She drew water from the kitchen boiler and washed, and dried them on the roller towel. As she went about her work, putting the house in order and looking into the store-cupboard, larder and cellar she could see through the windows that lovely, stainless world, somehow miraculously new and challenging. She wound the clock and set it going, and its tick-tock sounding through the house seemed to echo ⁱⁿ aside her, rhythmical and calm. In the larder she had found some bottles of meat extract, and she warmed up a cupful and carried it upstairs. Bob was sitting by his master's bed, resting his muzzle on it, and watching Magnal. His stump of a tail welcomed her.

The improvised feeding-cup needed cleaning, and she hurried downstairs with it, washed and warmed it, and returning, filled it, and carried it to the bed. The man's lips opened, and she gave it to him little by little. His feverish eyes looked up at her like the eyes of a sick and bewildered child. Who was she? Whence had she come?

His breathing seemed less distressed, for the stove had taken the bitter chill from the room.

She spoke to him, and her voice was not the voice of a woman of the people. It was deliberate and deep.

"That's better. * A little and often, to keep your strength up. I'll light a fire in that grate."

Sitting down to a late mid-day meal, it was past two o'clock, she was posed by that most pertinent question, what of help, what of a doctor? Should she venture out into that snow, and try to find some cottage or farm whence a message could be sent? And could she face that snow a second time, and how would she explain * herself? Her austere, thin face was like a profile on a cameo, her grey eyes calm. The old house, or that part of it which was habitable, seemed to be growing warm and happy with itself, and suddenly she smiled. If life had thrust this last strange experience upon her, why should she not accept it and carry it through? Years of experience in the infirmary of the institution that had housed her had made her familiar with the nursing of such a case as this. She knew how little could be done by medicine. The patient had to fight for survival, helped by the cunning and kindness of human hands.

She smiled. Almost the poise of her head became defiant. She would stay; she would not send for help. She would dare this last adventure, and if she saved a life she

could look fate straight in the eyes before she surrendered her own.

She cleared away, washed up, mended the fires, and collecting her bag, carried it up to that other bedroom which was furnished. The bed was unmade, but she discovered the cupboard where Magnal had stored his spare linen and blankets. She lit a fire in the room, and spread the bedclothes to air upon the back of two chairs. She unpacked her bag, and there was not much to unpack, a nightdress, a pair of slippers, washing things, a brush and comb. Bob appeared and smiled upon her labour and wagged a tail; they had become friends in a common crisis. Milk was warming in the kitchen; she beat up an egg in it and carried it upstairs. It seemed to her that her patient was more at ease, his breathing less distressed. She fed him as she would have fed a child.

Leaving Bob with his master she descended to other duties, those familiar household jobs which once had been hers. She found a strange pleasure in them, ~~assuagement~~, and as she moved about the house she began to absorb its peculiar atmosphere and to question it. Here were lovely things, rugs, furniture, glass, china, and she touched them with tender hands. His desk challenged her. His day-book lay open and she read the last entry.

"The ultimate wisdom is hidden in the secret self.
A crowd contains no secrets that are worth while."

She saw an envelope on the desk.

"Modred Magnal Esq.

Poste Restante,

G.P.O.

Blenborough,"

So, that was his name! And even a postman did not
visit this solitary house.

How strange it all seemed, just as though she had
gone to sleep in the snow, and dreamed her last dream!

IX.

She was in and out of his room that night, stealing in in her black mackintosh, an extemporised dressing-gown, to keep the fire going and to feed him. Magnal was more conscious in a dazed and dreamy way. This dark figure drifted in and out of silent room, carrying a candle, bending over him, giving him warm milk. He was just a body of mute acceptance, vaguely wondering, aware of less labour in his breathing, and of a less dishevelled and fevered mind.

On her last visit she found him asleep, and she did not disturb him. She was very weary, and she too needed sleep. Well, she would sleep for an hour or two and call it conservation, but she did not wake as she had meant^{ed} to do. She had no watch, but she woke to hear the old clock striking eight.

Heavens, had she slept for five hours! But it had refreshed her, and she hurried out of bed and drew back the curtains to find that more snow was falling, coming down like swan's down and with a strange finality so far as she was concerned. Nature was aiding and abetting her. There would be no escape. She put on slippers and her mackintosh, and went down to light the fire and heat up milk and water. She heard the dog come lolopping down the

stairs; she fed him, and when he had eaten his biscuits and lapped his water, he went back to his master's room. She had not troubled to do her hair, and when she carried in his hot milk, her grey hair hung down about her austere but gentle face. Bob was lying across the foot of Magnal's bed.

She looked quickly and ^{anxiously} ~~avidly~~ at the face on the pillow. It appeared less flushed, less distressed. His breathing seemed easier. She was aware of his eyes looking at her as though he saw her through a kind of haze, and was conscious of her as a strange and puzzling presence.

"Your milk."

She fed him, and his lips were less fumbling. He kept looking at her in a dazed and bothered way. He was sufficiently conscious to ask a silent question, but not conscious enough to answer it. What is all this? And who are you? He was just a weak and helpless body, accepting as in a dream this unknown woman's ministrations.

Well, she could suppose that he supposed that she was his nurse!

But the house called her. Almost she was beginning to feel at home in it, and as she went about her work, she watched the snow falling. It satisfied her, it was so beautiful and final. She made herself early morning tea,

and sat in the warm kitchen and enjoyed it. How long was it since she had enjoyed early morning tea? She could defy the weather here, or rather - feel herself in collusion with it. What a lovely spot this must be when all those thorns were in flower and smelling sweet. She caught herself thinking - "Well, if he lives - I shall have saved his life, and the dog's." Then she chided herself. This was pure egoism. The answer to it was that this house had saved her life, for she had been resigned to death in the snow.

And now to work. She considered the supply of fuel. How long would it last, and where was the rest of it? Out there in one of the outbuildings? Well, if necessary she would have to clear a path and fetch in more coal and wood. And the light? Were there any more candles? There were. She found a packet in the great store-cupboard.

She had been in the house three days, when the fever had so far abated that Magnal's brain cleared and he began to question this strange situation. The crisis of the illness was upon him, and he had begun to spit up that red jelly-like substance that is characteristic of the disease. He was aware of this woman in black, with her white hair and madonna face, stealing in and out with cups of liquid

food, shaking up his pillows, and doing for him those elemental but somewhat embarrassing things that fall to the lot of a nurse. He had been too desperately ill to worry about such niceties; he had just accepted them in a dazed sort of way, and rather like an animal without the power of speech. - But now! w She came and carried away the loathsome stuff he was spitting up; she had to minister to his body's needs as to a very young child; she treated him rather like a child.

And suddenly he was intensely conscious of her, and intrigued by this mysterious presence.

"I say, w what's happened? - Who are you?"

She smiled that austere but gentle smile.

"You have been very ill. w You must not talk w ."

"But, my dear lady - !"

She held up a hand.

"No, no talking yet. w You can hear all about it - later, if you wish to."

That she was right, the coughing, straining self in him acknowledged. This damned muck took a lot of getting rid of. So, he had been desperately ill. w Well, of course. w But who the devil was she, and how had she arrived here? She was not wearing the uniform of a nurse. And where the blazes was the doctor?

He could ask Bob all those pregnant questions, but all that he got from the dog were tail-waggings.

"Who let her in? Why, I did, master. I howled and howled till someone came. - We should have been a couple of corpses but for her."

That undeniable fact rose up and impressed itself upon Magnal. What a situation! To be snowed up alone and desperately ill in this isolated house, ~~miles from anywhere~~, with no one likely to call and discover his dire need. No postman, no butcher or baker, no milkman, no casual friend. Assuredly he had tempted fate, and a sticky, smothering end. And the dog would have died of starvation in a house in which his master lay dead. - But who the devil was she, and how had she arrived here, and what had she been doing on the Downs in the thick of a snow-storm? Not a young woman, either. Fifty if she was a day, and with a face that somehow suggested an unhappy past.

There was no answer as yet to these questions, but his eyes followed her as she moved about the room. He found himself waiting and listening for her footsteps on the stairs. He was provoked to a gradual and live gratitude, and to a consenting acceptance of her as part and parcel of an extraordinary situation, he who boasted that he had never been ill, and that he could stand alone and confront

any combination of circumstances.

Well, this tangle of coincidences was making him look something of a fool.

The crisis had come and was past. That red glue was less adhesive and less in quantity. His physical self was stretched no longer on the rack of various acute discomforts. He could breathe. There was in him that delicious and languorous sense of serenity, peace after storm, the gentle undulation of the harbour after the frenzy of the deep and savage sea. He was getting well. - Damn it, he would make her talk to him!

She too realised that the ultimate confrontation of circumstance was inevitable. He would ask those fatal questions, and she would have to answer them, and that - no doubt - would mark the end of her sojourn in this house. When the snow went, so would she. Life had taught her to be a fatalist, and to shrug her shoulders at emotion, those blind urges and instincts beloved of the crowd. Well, of course, she would tell him the truth, and resume a pilgrimage which had no purpose. It would have been so much easier if she had gone to sleep in the snow, but she would pass away with one good piece of work to her credit. * But that was sentimentality, the English disease, the sort of sloppy

silliness which said that a house without children was a house without flowers.

She had come up to draw the curtains on the ninth day of his illness when her crisis arrived.

"Why not leave them for a while?"

"Just as you please."

His voice was normal, if a little weak, and he spoke with an air of tranquil intimacy.

"Sit down. - You must have had a devil of a lot to do during the last week."

She sat down by the window, and he saw her profile against the afterglow.

"Do you mind telling me who you are?"

There was a little silence before she answered him.

"Nobody."

"Indeed! ♣ And you came from nowhere?"

"Yes, in a sense, ♣ I came from nowhere."

"Won't you tell me what you were doing out in that snow?"

"Just - drifting."

"Like the snow?"

She bent her head.

"Yes. - Then I heard the dog."

"Calling for help?"

"Yes."

"What a lucky thing I had left that door unlocked. ♣"

Well, you saved somebody's life."

"If it was worth while - I, am glad."

"Isn't life worth while?"

"Sometimes, if you are not dead inside."

It seemed to Magnal that her most remarkable quality was her stillness. As the light faded he saw her as a black silhouette against the window, her hands folded in her lap, her white hair like a lace cap, and he was reminded of Whistler's portrait of his mother. Obviously, she did not waste words, or belong to the community of chatterers.

"You have not told me much, have you?"

"No."

"Not that I demand it. No official questionnaire - Form B.S.1957, to be submitted in triplicate, name in block letters! What a loathsome thing is the card-index mind!"

She looked out of the window.

"If I had not heard your dog I should be sleeping peacefully out there."

His head made a movement on the pillow.

"You mean - you wanted to - ?"

"I hadn't anything left to live for."

"Nothing?"

"I came out of prison a month ago. I was sentenced to twenty years - for - murder."

Again there was silence. The room grew darker. Said

the voice from the bed "I have often felt like murder. I have always held that killing may be ^{on} an occasion - a sacred act. * Who did you kill?"

She sat like a statue.

"My husband. * He was - ."

"That sort of man. * But this last week?"

"Oh - I just wandered. * I went to some of the old places. Everything had changed; it seemed so ugly. - I felt rather like a ghost. - Only - dead inside. - I realised that I did not want to go on, begin the struggle all over again."

"Yes, - I understand that."

"I mattered to nobody. When you are that you are dead."

Suddenly and silently she rose, crossed the room, lit the lamp, and recrossing the room drew the curtains.

"Do you think you could manage some biscuit and milk tonight? I am afraid there is no more bread."

She did not look at him, and he understood that she did not wish to be looked at.

"What I really should like would be an orange to suck. There were some."

"I'll get you one."

She went below and returned with an orange, a desert knife and a lump of sugar on a plate. Her composure was

complete, her grey eyes unflinching.

"I wondered whether you like to - ? "

"Suck it in the old fashioned way. * I would.

Will you - ?"

Deliberately she cut a cube out of the orange, and pushed in the lump of sugar. A little juice oozed on to her fingers.

"Will that do?"

"Excellently."

"Do you mind if I go now? The fires need mending."

"Well, of course, - otherwise - "

"We should have been frozen up."

She left him, and Magnal lay sucking the orange with the relish of a child. But his consciousness was not that of a child. What a fantastic situation! * Twenty years for murder! And how had she killed him? * With a knife, just as she had stuck that orange, deliberately and calmly. And the man? Some lascivious, smeary, succulent cad? * Well, of all the fantastic and tragic confessionals! She was no woman of the people to be inflamed by the mere flare of sex-rage. He would have said that she had the strange, cold serenity of a saint.

X.

It was thawing, and Magnal could lie and watch masses of snow sliding off the thatch and falling with a soft thud on the stones below. Gutters and rainpipes gurgled; his casement was open to a west wind ^{which} ~~that~~ was bringing a scurry of clouds and of rain. The girdle of snow about Mistover was being loosened, like a girdle of chastity dropped from the loins of the young year, and once more the road to Lammas would be open.

She brought him his breakfast on a tray, and as she placed it on the bed, she asked him a question.

"The snow is going. ♣ Would you like me to try and get a doctor?"

Magnal was fingering his upper lip. It bristled like a vigorous young toothbrush.

"Rather superfluous now, ♣ I think. ♣ What I do need is a barber."

She stood with hands folded, grey eyes fixed upon the opposite wall.

"Don't you think you ought to be examined? - Just to make sure."

"Do you wish it?"

"I - ?"

"Well, you have had all the responsibility. ♣ As a

matter of fact I think you have made a good job of it.
And the nearest house is two miles away."

"It is for you to decide."

He was pouring out his tea.

"I think I would prefer hot water and a razor. ⁴ It
will be a tonic to get rid of this disgusting growth. And
I must have a head of hair like a poet."

She glanced at him momentarily.

"Surely - that - can wait. ⁴ Where do you keep your
razor?"

"In the bathroom."

So, having breakfasted ~~had~~ Magnal shaved his upper
lip, with a mirror propped against his knees. "Well, you
do look a dirty old tramp!" And while he shaved away the
stubble he meditated upon other and human harvests. The
snow was going, and the road lay open, and this woman who
had nursed him back to life could go upon her way. It
would be a nice salute to gratitude if he were to send her
off with a ten pound note and perfunctory good wishes! Yes,
life was treating him with irony and a rather pungent sort
of humour. He had run away from humanity and all pursuing
petticoats, only to be placed at the mercy of a petticoat,
and in debt to it.

He wiped the lather from his face. Well, what was

he going to do about it? Neither sex nor sentiment need complicate the issue. He might suggest trying to find her a job somewhere, but would she accept it? Most certainly he did not want a woman messing about the place. Shocking situation! What a coup for the pressmen. Famous ex-physician rescued from death by an ex-murderess! What a nice, fat, slimy morsel for the sensation-mongers! Life could be a beastly business when its carcasses were hung up in the butcher's shop.

He heard the dog barking. Bob was out there in the garden with someone, presumably her. What was she doing? Sweeping the snow off the path? The dog's barking sounded playful. Maybe, he was having a game with the broom. He heard her voice.

"I can't sweep if you will bite it, Bob."

Bob - indeed! Had she suborned his dog? But what a horrid word! Poor soul, to play with a loving beast like Bob might be life to her after that living death.

Suddenly, one of those strange, human revelations was bestowed upon Modred Magnal. He was conscious of a tremor of compassion. Really, his separative egoism had been rather filthy, and perhaps that was why life had played this trick upon him. How could he turn the poor creature out in the middle of winter? She had given him all she

had to give. How could he say to her "I think you have served your purpose. Goodbye, and thanks - ^{most} awfully. Here is payment for services rendered." What would she do? Creep out and die in a ditch? Yes, that was quite probable. He might be damned selfish, but he would give her two months.

Philosopher he might be, thinking himself nicely self-analysed, but Puck was chuckling under the bed. Mr. Modred Magnal had accepted the devotion of a dog, and found it good and pleasant, and comforting to his soul. That he might accept the devotion of a woman, and find it equally comforting and comfortable was not yet history. ~~A man may pull faces at himself and poke fun at his own peccadilloes, but he can stop short of the ultimate analysis, and think that he has done enough when he has poked his dear self in the ribs with an ironic finger.~~

She came in presently to relieve him of his basin and shaving gear. Her face had a faint colour as though she had been out in the wind, running a race with the dog. Her grey eyes looked darker and deeper.

"Didn't I hear you outside?"

"Yes. Bob did so want a run. And I was sweeping the garden path."

"I hope that isn't an omen."

She had turned to carry the basin away, and she paused.

"An omen?"

"Yes. - Do you realise that I don't even know your name?"

She seemed to go rigid.

"My name! * Oh, - yes. * My married name was Peters."

"And somehow - you don't fancy it."

"No. * My maiden name was Allison."

"That sounds good English, * Miss Allison. And the rest of it?"

"Elizabeth."

"Good Tudor. * Well, - as I was going to say, I hope the sweeping of the path did not mean that you think of walking out of my gate?"

She appeared confused.

"Not - while - I can help."

And then she walked out of his room.

Magnal was beginning to remember. Peters - Peters?

Yes, now he did remember the case, a rather remarkable one, almost Crippen in its popularity. How ghoulish the crowd could be! Peters had been one of those cheerful cads, who buzz about like blowflies and take their pleasures in the drawing-room and on the dung-heap, and with complete callousness towards the victims. He had been Something in the City,

and his profession had necessitated his travelling about the country, and with remarkable ingenuity he had contrived to keep three different establishments in being, ~~as well as to~~ cultivate ~~carneal~~ ^{carneal} amours. He had been an expert liar, and a veritable Bluebeard, save that he shed his victims and did not cut their throats and hang them up in a cupboard. Seemingly his wife had forgiven him two such treacheries, but ultimately the succulent noisomeness of the ^{creature} ~~criminal~~ had turned her into a suburban Charlotte Corday. The French woman stabbed that nasty slug in his bath; Mrs. Peters bought a revolver and shot her husband in bed. She had declared calmly in court that he had been the cause of so much misery that she had thought him better dead. Very naturally a legalised community could not permit such anarchic individualism to function. Mrs. Peters had been ~~condemned~~ ^{condemned} to death, but an appeal to the Home Secretary had been signed by thousands of women, and she had been reprieved and sentenced to twenty years' imprisonment.

As memory picked up the threads of the tragedy, ~~Modred~~ Magnal realised how certain of her features and qualities were to be explained, her quiet and cultured voice, the quality of her hands, a sensitiveness that was masked behind a frozen serenity. So, this woman had served her penance,

and returned to the world of men and of women to find emptiness and disillusionment, and that the desire for life was dead in her. And no wonder. What was left in you, after such suppression, but resignation? And yet she had reacted to the dog's cry for help. No doubt a dog could be to her one of the few creatures that ^{was} were innocent and consoling. A dog did not ask questions. He did not know of or remember old, shameful, bitter things. He took you, as God might take you, for your eyes, voice, manner, the outward signs of inward grace. Perhaps she had tarried here and given him her service for the sake of the dog? Magnal could laugh gently at the thought. No doubt Bob was a more loveable creature than Magnal the man.

Daily, at about nine o'clock, when she had relieved Magnal of his breakfast tray, she took the dog for a run, and now that the snow had gone the full strangeness of this dead village was revealed to her. The great thicket of thorns, the brambles and the briars in their winter nakedness, did not conceal the bones of this crumbling skeleton. The place was as much a challenge to her as it had been to Magnal, but differently so. There was pathos in it, a wild sadness, the wet green ^{slow} glow of Thomas Hardy's Wessex. Magnal might have shrugged his shoulders at the picture of Whitehall

and Westminster squatting in chairs, and gabbling in public, and pouring out interminable official decretals in a bastard English which no rational being understood or wished to understand, while some obscure hamlet died for lack of water. Had it been brought to the notice of the Official World, sundry arid gentlemen would have scribbled chits to each other, and gone on scribbling until the problem had been pigeon-holed and comfortably eluded. - To Elizabeth Allison the place had a wild strange beauty, ~~that was eloquent to her secret heart.~~ While Bob hunted among the thorns, she explored those little dead, stone habitations. The deserted chapel with its locked door, and rusty hinges, the one other building that possessed a roof, had for her a mysterious and secret fascination. It made her think of some Rossetti or Burne Jones picture, an ^{Idan} Arthurs~~on~~ hermitage smothered in wild growth, the Chapel of the Briar Rose from whose narrow windows shone the light of the Grael.

She, too, discovered the tombstone which bore the name of Magnal. - Had that been the inspiration? Was it a case of the Return of the Native? She was moved by an almost childish desire to open the door of this little stone building, and explore it. What was it like inside? Derelict and cob-webbed, a home for bats?

Magnal would hear her return, and Bob's barking. Like

most dogs a closed door was to him a challenge, and a cause for hurry. He wanted to dash upstairs and in dog-language tell everything to his master. "I chased a rabbit. I nearly got it, but it sneaked into a hole. - And we've been to the chapel. * She * tried the door, but it's locked." He eluded Elizabeth Allison, and scrambled up the stairs and on to Magnal's bed, but the woman followed him.

"He's all wet. * Bob, dear, come and be dried."

Bob laughed at her. * What a joke!

"Bob has a passion for rabbit holes. * Go and be towelled, my lad."

She had brought Bob's towel with her, and she removed him from the bed.

"He does love his run. I'm afraid I haven't time to take him far."

She was kneeling and towelling the dog.

"Been exploring?"

"Yes. * What a strange, fascinating place!"

"The Deserted Village."

"How did it happen?"

"The wells and the brook dried up. No water. And nobody did anything about it."

"How sad. But there is water now."

"Yes, it welcomed the new owner by returning."

"How mysterious."

"This is mysterious country. The so-called dead are more prevalent than the living."

She was silent for a moment, drying the dog's head.

"That little chapel. - I tried the door."

"Locked, Miss Allison, and the key is lost."

"Haven't you been inside?"

"Not yet."

"I suppose it is no longer - what is the word - oh - consecrated?"

"Well, yes, in the real sense I should say it is. "

A place like that where country folk have worshipped must remain - rather sacred. I have looked up its history. It was a Chapel of Ease belonging to the Black Monks of Blenborough in 1233. The Benedictines had a Grange here."

She was so interested that she pulled one of Bob's ears as she towelled him, and he yelped.

"Oh, - poor lad! I I'm so sorry. I I wish there was a key."

"Want to see inside?"

"Yes."

"Well, I I dare say we could force the door."

"Oh, one shouldn't do that, I should one?"

"No. ¶ I'll get hold of a blacksmith some day and see what he can do about it. Those lancet windows are too narrow to squeeze through."

Their more perishable stores were running low, eggs, cheese, bacon, butter. There was no bread and the milk was tinned, and the confectioner's cake going mouldy. She was worried about it. He ¶ needed fresh milk and eggs and butter. ¶ But - ! This new life - every path of it - seemed to be closed in by that one abrupt little word. ¶ How to explain things, ¶ herself? She gathered her courage and spoke to Magnal of the problem.

"How could we get ¶ some fresh food?"

"Stocks running out?"

"No bread, no fresh milk or butter."

He did not know that she had denied herself, and given him the last of the butter and the eggs.

"Great Scott, ¶ I've been asleep. Could you walk as far as Bareacres Farm?"

"How far is it?"

"About two miles. ¶ Due south along the old road. People named Wise. I've no doubt they would fit us out, or shop for you."

She looked frightened. She shrank from strange new

contacts. How would she explain herself? Magnal was watching her.

"You'll want some money?"

"Yes."

"Look in my coat pocket. The one you hung up in the cupboard."

She brought the jacket to him, and her respect for his pocket both amused and touched him. He drew out the wallet, and gave her a couple of pound notes. She folded them up, and returned his jacket to the cupboard. Would he mind being left for an hour? Well, he was not an infant in arms, and the dog would keep him company. She said that she would go at once to Bareacres Farm, and see what the Wises could do for her.

Magnal heard the porch door close, and her footsteps on the paved path. He looked quizzically at Bob, who was lying on the bed, licking his paws.

"I wonder if we shall see her again, my lad?"

Bob blinked at his master. Probably he had no such doubts.

It was a mild, grey day, vapourish and dim, with the great hills merging into the sky. The old road had become a grassy track, and the sodden turf soon soaked her rotten shoes. One pair of walking shoes, two pairs of stockings,

one pair almost past mending! What predicaments life could produce for you! She had entered Lammas Farm with three shillings and fourpence in her pocket, not even the price of a pair of shoes. Well, if flints cut her feet, the righteous could describe it as her penance. She was beyond or above petulance and resentment. Ash Wood loomed over her, black and forbidding. She saw the buildings of Bareacres in the shallow valley beyond, with a smirch of smoke rising from one chimney. It looked to her rather a desolate sort of place. But why be afraid, why shirk the scrutiny of another woman's eyes? Surely your white head and shabby clothes should advertise your respectability?

Mrs. Wise was making butter when the front door knocker sounded, and Mary Wise was apt to be peevish on the days when she made butter.

"Coo! ★ See who it is, Bessy."

Bessy went and opened the door, and stared at the shabby and elderly stranger.

"Mrs. Wise?"

"No, she's making butter."

"Could I speak to her?"

Bessy called to her mistress.

"Someone wants to see you."

Mrs. Wise let out another sound of impatience, and wiping her hands on her apron, marched to the farmhouse door.

She gazed with suspicion upon the shabby figure in the black mackintosh. A tramp? But Miss Allison wore no hat.

"Yes."

"I wonder if you can help me?"

Mrs. Wise made a movement as though to close the door.

"We don't * give * to - ."

She saw the other woman wince.

"But I have come from Mr. Magnal."

Mrs. Wise's hand refrained. Her brown eyes brightened.

"What, * from Lammas?"

"Yes. * Mr. Magnal has been very ill. * I - I've been looking after him. * We were snowed up."

Mrs. Wise was interested.

"I didn't know Mr. Magnal had a woman."

What a way of putting it! Miss Allison realised that explanations would be impossible. Let the lady assume that she was a hired help.

"You see, - I haven't been able to get anywhere. * We are out of eggs and milk and butter and bread."

Mrs. Wise was still suspicious. This shabby person might be telling a story.

"Did Mr. Magnal send you?"

"Yes. * If you could sell us - ."

The pound notes became visible, and the sight of ready cash appeared to reassure the farmer's wife.

"Yes, & I might. & What's been the matter?"

"Oh - influenza. & I couldn't leave to get a doctor."

"Come inside. & I might manage one loaf, and the other things. & You haven't brought a basket."

"No, how silly of me! & I came away in a hurry."

"Well, I dare say I can manage."

"Thank you so much. & Mr. Magnal wondered if you could do some shopping for us - if you happen to be going into one of the villages."

"I could. Mr. Wise is driving me into Camden tomorrow."

"Oh, & thank you. It would be such a help. I can give you the money."

Mrs. Wise became more human.

"Step into the parlour. & Got a list of what you want?"

"No, but I could write one."

This shabby person appeared to be a rather helpless and harmless creature. In a place like Mistover you couldn't expect anything very bright and young, and efficient to take service, especially with an eccentric gentleman like Magnal. Mrs. Wise showed her visitor into the parlour, a grim and fireless room with a large yellow pumpkin and a sheaf of Pampas grass decorating an old fashioned chiffonnier. The

walls were plastered with family photographs, including those of the bearded, crinolined, straw-hatted sixties. Mrs. Wise became more chatty. She found Miss Allison a piece of paper, a penny bottle of ink and a crusty pen.

"I'm just making butter. * If you like to wait ten minutes I can wrap you up a pound."

"Thank you so much."

"You sit down and write out your list. * We don't have a fire here except on Sundays. * Carting coal is such a business. Is Mr. Magnal all right for coal?"

Miss Allison sat down at the round table where more photographs were arranged round the centre-piece, a vase of dried Cape Cherries on the family bible, but Mrs. Wise did not return immediately to her butter-board. Her home was not only Bareacres but bare of incident, and any sort of happening was a god-send.

"You must have had a time, him ill like that, with all that snow on the ground."

"I had."

"Haven't been there long, have you?"

"No."

Mrs. Wise's lingering attitude invited confidences, but Miss Allison appeared to be concentrating on her list. * Oranges. Yes, she must put down oranges. He - liked

oranges. And prunes. The abominable pen scratched and shed unnecessary ink.

"Rather a - peculiar - gentleman, Mr. Magnal," said the voice.

"Oh, is he? * I haven't found him so."

"Well, # fancy buying all those ruins, and going to live there all by himself. 4 You'd almost think - ."

Miss Allison was frowning over her list.

"I didn't quite catch your meaning."

"You'd almost think there was a reason."

"A reason?"

"That he wanted to get away from people."

Miss Allison added baking-powder to her list.

"Perhaps he does."

Mrs. Wise's casts caught no fish, but Miss Allison left her list and a pound note, and departed with a borrowed basket in which were a loaf of bread, two bottles of milk, six eggs, and a pound of butter. Mrs. Wise had had to find change for a pound note. She returned to Bessie and her butter, and over the butter-table much conversation passed. Said Mrs. Wise: "Funny a woman living all alone with a mad sort of man like Magnal. - But then, of course, a funny old stick like that # would be quite safe, tee-hee, if you know what I mean."

Bessie giggled.

"Safe - about children."

"No, that's just what I didn't mean. * Even on a
desert island you wouldn't fancy a man getting off with -
her."

XI.

When Medred Magnal told her that he was getting up and coming downstairs for tea, she stood and pleaded with him not to be so venturesome.

"Oh, you mus'nt. Not all at once. I'll light a fire here, and you can sit by it."

"Miss Allison, * I'm bored with bed."

"I know you must be, * but - please *."

He smiled, wagged his great shaggy head at her and was docile.

"Very well. * Perhaps you are right. * I must be giving you a devil of a lot of work."

"I like it."

She carried up coal and wood and lit his fire, and while she was busy with it she gave him a piece of news.

"What do you think I found, Mr. Magnal?"

"Do I have three guesses?"

"The chapel key."

"And where?"

"There is a little hollow place in the wall by the door. It was hidden there."

"Did you get in?"

"Yes. * Some of the old pews are there, and the altar. It is in a dreadful state, cobwebs and dust and litter."

"I expect it is. We shall have to clean it up some day."

With the fire alight she left him to get up and put on his dressing-gown while she went to prepare his tea. She had pushed an arm-chair in front of the fire. Magnal turned back the clothes, swung his legs out of bed, stood up, and experienced that strange feeling when the muscles have become like soft wax. He sat down somewhat abruptly on the edge of the bed. Well, the woman was right, after all. His head seemed to be going round, and his heart was racing. His dressing-gown lay ready on the bed but, for the moment, he did not feel equal to accomplishing the simple act of getting into it. Should he roll back into bed? No, that would be cowardly. He sat quite still for a minute, and then, hearing her footsteps on the stairs, he grabbed the dressing-gown, and managed to slip into it. Couldn't be caught in your pyjamas! He stood up, made a weak-kneed and unsteady dash for the chair and collapsed into it. Just in time. She had placed a blanket over the arm of the chair, and he spread it over his knees.

She came in with the tray, paused, and looked at him. She did not say "I told you so," but he made his confession with a haggard grin.

"You were quite right. No legs yet."

"Do you think you ought to go back to bed?"

"Must make a beginning. ♣ My pride has been chastened. Good idea, hot tea."

She put the tray on a table beside his chair, and poured out his tea for him, but when she passed him the cup and saucer his hand was so shaky that disaster and spilt tea seemed imminent. Quickly she took the cup and saucer from him, and her eyes were compassionate.

"I shall have to hold it for you."

His reaction was like that of a child.

"Just wait a moment. - Now then, give me the cup without that jiggling saucer. ♣ That's better. ♣ How are the mighty fallen!"

She stood, anxiously watching him, ready to help but not to fuss. She was wise in her intentions; this man would abominate chattering interference. The thing must be done silently and with sensitive stealth. She would serve him better through gentle self-effacement. She picked up the plate of bread and butter and deposited it in his lap.

He gave her an upward, whimsical look.

"Thanks, Miss Allison. I'll manage now. ♣ Good farmhouse butter, what!"

She smiled at him.

"I've spread it rather thickly."

"Splendid. 4 I feel I could swim in butter. 4 But, I say, Miss Allison, are you getting plenty to eat, yourself?"

"Yes, plenty."

For, she was feeding as well upon other things, activities that may be precious and nourishing to a woman. Her day was full from dawn to lights-out, and if she went to bed weary, she slept the sleep of profound and secret satisfaction. She was infinitely grateful to this man, for, in casting her into this strange house, life and Modred Magnal had combined to make her feel less the out-cast. Gratitude has been condemned as a slave's virtue, or laughed at as a lively sense of favour to come, but neither sneer would have touched her. Nor, in giving all that she had to give did she say to herself - "He ought to be grateful.". An intimacy that might have been embarrassing had been forced upon them both and yet her succouring of him had seemed so inevitable that both had accepted its naturalness. Moreover, Modred Magnal was no ordinary man. ~~and not~~ ~~vividly sensual to this woman who had suffered.~~ There was an obvious bigness about him both in body and spirit, a laughing candour, a subtle simplicity, a magnanimous ease that was like the green hills about this solitary place.

Maybe, she did utter to herself in secret the incredulous cry: "Oh, if I could stay here always," but when that voice spoke in her she answered it with resigned austerity "But that could not be possible. He couldn't want you."

Magnal's first coming downstairs was a new experience for her. She had aired and laid out his clothes, while he, pretending to read, had observed her. A gentle, self-effacing creature - this, but was she going to be too devoted and a nuisance? It would be no new experience for Magnal to find the magnificent male in him too attractive to women. The dear creatures had played all sorts of romantic tricks on him in order to persuade him to satisfy them. But, damn it, undiluted sex would not embarrass him in the person of this middle-aged woman.

"Can I help you?"

"No, I can manage."

She left him, but she must have been waiting at the foot of the stairs, for when his bedroom door opened she was there to help him descend, should he need her help. But she did not fuss. She just stood and watched while he came slowly and cautiously down that steep old staircase.

His chair was ready before a blazing fire. Bob, who had shared in his master's new adventure, lay down at his god's feet. The room was warm and pleasant, and strangely

welcoming. It was a live room, not a chamber that had been dead and cold for four weeks.

"Would you like your book?"

He let himself relax. "By Jove, it was good to be downstairs!

"No. I'll just look at the fire."

She left him, closing the door gently. He heard her mount the stairs, and the sound of her movements in the room above. She was making his bed. The old clock ticked steadily. Peace, perfect peace, a deep chair, cushions, a warm fire and a dog. Had his illness made him soft, and sapped some of the strenuousness of his separative soul? After all, a pair of human hands could smooth out life's creases.

He dozed, fell asleep. Some light sound woke him. She was standing by his chair, and Bob was rubbing his head against her skirts. Obviously, the dog had accepted her.

"Would you like to sit up to your lunch, or shall I bring a tray?"

"Oh, I'll sit at table. Good for morale."

She and the dog went out together, but in a couple of minutes she was back again. He could watch her in the round Georgian mirror over the mantelpiece. How quietly this woman moved! She was laying the table, and the miniature

picture framed a cover for one on the glossy black oak, one glass, one set of silver and cutlery, one napkin, one chair. So - ? The inference was obvious and challenging. She did not propose to take her meals with him.

Had Magnal been able to look into the kitchen he would have gained further evidence of her self-effacement. Her place was laid at one end of the kitchen table. And she had made significant changes here. A square of bright cretonne which she had appropriated covered one half of the table. She had a chair and a rug by the fire, and an improvised work-basket stood on the dresser. Her shopping list had included needles, thread, and darning wool.

Magnal's strength, when the turn of the tide came, flowed like a spring tide with a half gale behind it. The winter had opened out into an unorthodox March, which produced a heat-wave and an incipient greenness on the elder bushes and the thorns. Great white clouds went sailing across the sky, and the sun played games with them and the landscape, throwing fistfuls of sunlight at a hilltop or into the lap of a valley. Soon, the birds would be busy nesting, and shrilling out their matins in the Mistover thorns. Magnal, glad of the wind and the weather,

and the great, spacious gestures of the Downs, went forth and wandered like a giant refreshed.

As for Elizabeth Allison, she seemed to slip about the house like a shadow, sedulous in service, but silent. Almost, she suggested some frightened ghost, dreading to be conjured off with bell and book. Oh, what peace was here, no mouthy ^{and} faces, no staring eyes, no questions, no plucking fingers! Here was work for her hands, someone to whom she might dream of feeling necessary. - Was he too much aware of her presence in the house? Her intuitive hope lay in gentle effacement, in functioning like some silent human mechanism. ~~This sweet and solitary world was like a re-created Eden to this white-headed Eve.~~

Magnal, marching with his ash stick and his dog, and climbing the high places, was drinking in the strength and the joy of it. If Elizabeth Allison felt like a humble and docile Eve, Modred Magnal was very much the Jehovah of his little world. He sat with his feet within a yard of the dew-pond on Greenbarrow, and looked out and down upon the land that was his. There was laughter in him. Loin-clothes would be necessary in a world that now contained a woman, that is to say - if the conventions were to be considered. Moreover, he was beginning to wonder whether

vision. She did not realise that ~~Medred~~ Magnal's particular Lady might be a figure of symbolism, woman in the abstract, but mysterious and lovely, and perhaps perilous like the Imogens, the Guineveres, the Rosamunds, ~~the~~ the Iseults. ² Who was she? ⁴ For the possible existence of such a creature gave a jolt to Miss Allison's new and delicate sense of security. She might be prone to elevate ~~Medred~~ Magnal into a domestic hero, but the advent of an Eve might bring cankered apples falling from the tree.

As for the rest of the quotation it was in tune with her own temper, save perhaps in its scorn. Maybe, she had passed beyond scorn, and thought of the crowd as a hotch-potch of piteous fools, though, like ~~Medred~~ Magnal, she did not desire to mix with the multitude. Man might cease to be boring only when he was dead, and the bathos of his little stupidities and complacencies had become dry bones. She granted ~~Medred~~ Magnal his right to apartness, his Egyptian solitude in the pyramid of living green. He was not of the crowd, and never would be, but was like one of those half mythical figures, Odysseus, Merlin, Richard of the Lion Heart, John the Baptist, ⁴ William Blake, for behind that austere thin face, and those grey eyes Elizabeth Allison concealed a certain imaginative wildness, gleams of fantasy, a sensitiveness that was not of the crowd.

clumps of black branched beeches. There was work to be done there, for the five round barrows had never been opened. But what of the beech trees and their roots, thrust deep into those knolls like talons grasping the secret bones of the dead? No, it would be dastardly to cut the roots of those stately trees. There were barrows and hut-circles on Dead Man's Down, and no trees to be offered up in sacrifice.

Back among the thorns of Mistover with their spangles of green growth Magnal remembered the chapel, and Miss Allison's finding of the key. He strolled on to the little grey building. He noticed that the ring of the old latch on the nail-studded door had been purged of rust. He put his hand to it and found the door unlocked. He entered, and in that dim interior with the criss-cross lights from the lancets he could imagine some Galahad kneeling in black armour with a silver halo about his head. - But someone had been busy here. The little sanctuary had been swept and garnished. A white cloth covered the altar, and upon it was set a brown pot, and in the pot were a few sprigs of willow.

Magnal stood and stared at the offering. "So, woman had been busy here, not merely Martha, but Mary.

Spencer

160. 150

In due season Magnal discovered two names for her, one was "The Silent Woman", the other "St. Elizabeth".

The primroses were out in the banks down by the Mistbourne when he put that proposition to her.

"Miss Allison, * I think we ought to come to some definite arrangement. & Would you care to stay on here? ^ I know it is a lonely sort of place."

She was standing in the parlour doorway, framed by it, with the darkness of the passage behind her, her hands clasped, her white hair drawn back from her forehead. Magnal saw a kind of sheen, an emotional pallor spread over her face. Her lips moved, but for the moment no sound came from them.

"No obligation, you know, if you prefer - ."

The shock of this good news, for Magnal did not know how good it was to her, had left her confused and dumb, but when he seemed to doubt her acceptance, words came to her.

"I - I should be so happy to stay - if I am no nuisance to you. ^ I love this place."

He looked at her whimsically.

"I shouldn't say you were a - nuisance. * I have found life rather ^ easier."

"I'm so glad."

"Well, as to terms. Would thirty shillings a week and your keep satisfy you?"

She seemed a little breathless.

"Oh, - I don't want money."

"My dear lady, I happen to be a rich man. Service is service, and money ^s somewhat a necessity. I presume that on occasions you will want to buy - clothes, and other things."

"A pound a week would be ample."

"No, let's keep to my figure. As it is I owe you for about four months. I'll get out of your debt."

He felt for his wallet. He was one of those men who are careless about cash, and so prefer to carry plenty of it. He counted out the money in clean notes, and laid them on the table.

"You may want to do some shopping."

She came forward slowly, and gathered up the notes.

"Thank you, Mr. Magnal, for - everything."

He was filling his pipe before going forth to tackle the jobs that - inevitably - were his, when he saw her pass down the path to the gate. She was carrying a bunch of primroses, and she turned left towards the chapel. Was

this a thank offering? Well, he too had things to be thankful for, or so it seemed, and lighting his pipe, he went forth with Bob into the walled garden. He was labouring ^{mightily} ~~nightly~~ here with spade and sickle, preparing the soil for their garden crops, cutting down weeds and burning them. There would be no vegetables or fruit at Lammas unless he grew them, and he was finding these simple labours somehow good. Man and the earth and the fruits of the earth were made for each other, and what a lovely hunger he caught from playing with the soil. Moreover, the days work was teaching him his own ignorance of the simple life of the grower of food, and that necessity may be the best schoolmaster.

Elizabeth Allison had reached the chapel. She unlocked it, and carrying her primroses to the altar she laid them upon the altar cloth. Then she knelt down where hundreds of knees had worn the stone in the service of the sacrament. She raised her face to the east window, and the sunlight fell upon it. She gave thanks to her God for this reprieve, and for the assuagement and the peace of this sweet place. And, God be thanked, she had work to do! The things which her hands did mattered.

Spain.

163. 153

She came to him each morning after breakfast with a little note-book and a pencil, and stood straight and still, just inside the door.

"Your orders, please, for today, sir."

"Could you manage jam-roll, the suety thing, I mean?"

"Yes, sir. ♣ We are getting rather short of sugar, and one or two other things."

"Stores need replenishing? ♣ I had better drive you into Blenborough or Camden."

"I don't think the house ought to be left, sir."

"But don't you want to do some shopping?"

"Isn't there a bus service?"

"I believe there is, from Camden through Melfont St. Giles. I'll find out."

"I could go in one afternoon, sir, if you don't mind."

"And ^{carry} buy all your parcels from Melfont?"

"I can manage quite well, sir. ♣ Besides, doesn't the postman call?"

"He hasn't hitherto, except on one or two special occasions, and then he was grieved. ♣ Well, let the beggar bike here with your parcels. I can do some of your shopping for you."

So, Magnal went shopping solus, leaving Bob behind to keep Miss Allison company, which was bad luck for Bob, but

he had two or three secret lumps of sugar to console him. She had given Magnal a list as long as his arm, and when he had worked through it and loaded up the car, even the dog would have been superfluous. He had tea in Blenborough, and the sun was sinking towards the hills when the car bumped and rolled into green harbour. It was becoming rather a rattlesome, noisy machine, and not till he pulled up in the Lammas yard did he hear a surprising sound. A bell was ringing like some hermitage bell in a mediaeval landscape, a faint, mellow pealing. "Where the devil?" And then he realised whence it came. The little old bell in the gable of the chapel was giving tongue after all these years, and Miss Allison must be ringing it.

St. Elizabeth was celebrating vespers.

xii.

Miss Allison went shopping in Blenborough, and ~~Modred~~ Magnal was to become aware of a sudden transformation. She had bloomed into a mauve linen dress, her uniform of service, and though she eschewed a cap, her white hair, ~~smooth and austere~~, sustained the illusion. Her shoes were new; so were her stockings. Her face, even, had a kind of newness, as though the patina of prison had been rubbed from it, and both the flesh and the spirit had been repolished, ~~which was so~~. She had good food, clean air, work to do, an individual bed to sleep in, peace, and the sleek sweetness of this stout old house. Here was security, and she was determined to cherish it. Here was a man who was not quite like other men. Here was a dog who came to her to be fed and caressed.

Magnal considered her with a twinkle of approbation.

"Miss Allison, ~~W~~ you look quite - ."

He left the inference to be drawn, for no word was quite suitable or adequate. Smart, ~~W~~ fashionable, renovated? Oh, no! Hygienic might have been used by the materialists. The thing was much more subtle than that. It was as though Elizabeth Allison had taken her soul out of a moth-bag, shaken it and brushed it, and discovered a new gloss in

its texture.

"I did some shopping, sir.."

"So I see."

"May I talk to you about one or two things?"

"Of course."

"You ought to have fresh meat, Mr. Magnal, and bread that isn't a week old. And eggs."

"So - should you, I think. This is a rather austere house."

"I - quite - understand. But when I was in Blenborough I found out that the principal butcher and the baker and the grocer deliver at Bareacres once a week. They could come on here."

He smiled at her.

"Well, I'll arrange it. I'll turn over all the housekeeping and the accounts to you. By the way, aren't you making a lot of work for yourself?"

"I can manage, sir."

But to Medred Magnal she remained the Silent Woman, and though she effaced herself, he ceased to regard her as a mere human mechanism. As a student of life and a master of its mysteries, he wondered about her. What secret scars did she carry, the stigmata of Society's unkindness? Magnal, who had been too attractive to women,

and had eluded woman as a permanent mate, yet, felt no fear of Miss Elizabeth Allison. Obviously, her martyrdom had turned her into neither a cynic nor a sceptic, and ~~here the Flower of Faith could put out its white petals and refrain from the ravishing redness of the rose.~~

"No", thought Magnal, who, in his more primitive years had experienced the allure of women, "I don't think I shall have to lock my bedroom door. Besides, she's fifty, if she is a day, and not - of the people.", which was a somewhat shallow conclusion, for woman remains woman, and at eighty may set her cap at something.

As for her more intimate interest in him as a mind, that did not come within his purview, but - none the less - it existed. When dusting his desk she might allow herself to read what he was reading, or what he had written in his day-book. Such entries were impersonal in the utilitarian or physical sense, and touched upon esoteric things, and the gropings, prejudices and beliefs of other thinkers.

One entry challenged her. It was a quotation from Giordano Bruno - "I am displeased with the bulk of mankind; I hate the vulgar rout; I despise the authority of the multitude, and I am enamoured with one particular Lady." Miss Allison stood and stared at the page, with one hand to her cheek, though the mere page had passed from her

vision. She did not realise that ~~Medred~~ Magnal's particular Lady might be a figure of symbolism, woman in the abstract, but mysterious and lovely, and perhaps perilous like the Imogens, the Guineveres, the Rosamunds, ~~the~~ the Iseults. ² Who was she? ⁴ For the possible existence of such a creature gave a jolt to Miss Allison's new and delicate sense of security. She might be prone to elevate ~~Medred~~ Magnal into a domestic hero, but the advent of an Eve might bring cankered apples falling from the tree.

As for the rest of the quotation it was in tune with her own temper, save perhaps in its scorn. Maybe, she had passed beyond scorn, and thought of the crowd as a hotch-potch of piteous fools, though, like ~~Medred~~ Magnal, she did not desire to mix with the multitude. Man might cease to be boring only when he was dead, and the bathos of his little stupidities and complacencies had become dry bones. She granted ~~Medred~~ Magnal his right to apartness, his Egyptian solitude in the pyramid of living green. He was not of the crowd, and never would be, but was like one of those half mythical figures, Odysseus, Merlin, Richard of the Lion Heart, John the Baptist, ⁴ William Blake, for behind that austere thin face, and those grey eyes Elizabeth Allison concealed a certain imaginative wildness, gleams of fantasy, a sensitiveness that was not of the crowd.

But the coming of Miss Allison stimulated Magnal to put a new complexion upon the face of Lammas. That which might have served a lone bachelor was not adequate for this new menage. Mr. Bull was sent for, and had a glimpse of Mr. Magnal's new housekeeper. Ha, how had the Mighty fallen! Mr. Magnal was discovering the virtues of a cook.

Magnal and Mr. Bull went over the house together. Both the other two bedrooms were to be completed, one as a spare bedroom, the other as a bathroom and lavatory. An additional lavatory was to be tucked in downstairs, and drains and a cesspool laid and built. An engine and pump were to be installed in the old wash-house, and the water piped into the kitchen, bathroom and bedrooms. Running water was to be delivered to the bedrooms. A new kitchen and scullery were to be built out in the backyard, and the old kitchen converted into a sitting-room for Mr. Magnal's housekeeper. The stone flooring was to be removed and floorboard laid.

"Very good, sir. * But we shall make a considerable noise and mess."

"We can use half the house. * If it comes to that I can manage in a tent, and my housekeeper can have the caravan."

"I should wait till it is a little warmer, sir."

"April. - How long will you take?"

"I think we could finish the interior work in a month or six weeks. I'll put all my men on to it."

"Thanks, Mr. Bull. Then, go ahead."

Followed six weeks of dust and disorder, hammering and whistling, and desultory gossip, for which Medred Magnal apologised to Miss Allison. Was it that he was afraid she might be upset by those activities, and that he did not want to lose her? Miss Allison accepted these improvements calmly, but with a secret satisfaction and a new sense of security.

So, the thorns came into flower, and Mistover wore a white garland, and the smell of the blossom drifted into Lammas Farm, and no scent of incense was needed in the chapel. Elizabeth Allison kept it swept and garnished, and took to herself other labours. She explored the deserted cottage gardens for old fashioned flowers which had managed to survive among the weeds, Martagon and Turk's Cap Lilies, pæonies, honesty, golden rod, and a few roses, among them York and Lancaster. She purloined these flowers, or marked the roots for ultimate transfer to the Lammas garden. She ordered flower seeds by post and sowed them in the front

Garden. She began to cast covetous eyes upon the farmyard and the old dovecot and one or two outbuildings. Would Mr. Magnal allow her to keep a few hens to provide them with fresh eggs?

Magnal, not unaware of all these activities, began to question her capacity for so much labour.

"Aren't you overworking yourself, Miss Allison?"

"No, sir, ~~✓~~ I like it."

"No time - for what the prigs call culture."

"Isn't - living, and doing pleasant things - culture?"

"Of course it is. I think we moderns are too much with books. ~~✓~~ Read, mark and learn in doing, - what?"

"Books have no hands, sir."

"And sometimes damned dull heads. - ~~Have you ever visited a place called the London Library?~~"

"~~No, Mr. Magnal.~~"

"~~An excellent institution, but I would like to make a bonfire of half of it. Full of the products of dusty minds. But that, of course, is blasphemy to the erudite.~~"

Peace reigned, and the Downland turf became a carpet of flowers. Even the Long Barrow was pied with trefoil and veronica, and Magnal, sitting in meditation there, held converse with his friend "Minos". He asked questions which

the dead could have answered.

"Did these hills satisfy you, my friend? Had you cities to run to? Did you drive to Avebury in your chariot, and put up at the Club, and buy the latest things in tartans and armlets? And did your wench covet gold chains from Ireland?"

The wind in the grasses answered him.

"These were my hills and I loved them. ♠ But we laboured here. Have your eyes not seen our cattle-pens and our corn-terraces?"

Magnal had seen them, and they gave him food for thought. They were a challenge. So were the derelict fields of Lammas, and those crumbling cottages. If man was made for the land, then - the land was for labour.

"Minos, my friend, did the wander-lust trouble you? Did you take ship ♠ and voyage into Spain, and drink Cretan wine, and bow yourself in the temple of Isis. ♠ Did you visit Chaldea, and talk with its star-sages?"

"Yes, ♠ yes," said the grasses, "but my life was here. I had my flocks and my herds, and my fields of corn. And our miners laboured in the west country, and traders came to us from over the sea. And at the proper season I gathered with my peers and all the people in our great

sanctuary at Avebury, and I stood upon Silbury Hill
and hailed the rising sun."

A little figure passing along the old road walked in
upon Magnal's meditations. It was Mrs. Mary Wise paying a
visit of curiosity to Miss Elizabeth Allison, a pilgrimage
that was not desired by the Silent Woman of Lammas Farm.
Modred Magnal sat up and took notice, and Bob let out a
bark at the distant figure.

"Society invades us, my lad. We had better go to the
rescue."

The Lammas garden was looking gay, with Miss Allison's
annuals coming into flower, and the old house seemed to give
him an ironic, smiling look. In the parlour he found his
tea laid upon the smaller of the gate-legged tables, the
old Spode softly brilliant on the polished oak. He noticed
the clean lace d'oylies under the thin bread and butter and
the home-made plum cake. These delicate details challenged
him. Miss Allison was home-proud, and a lover of beautiful
cleanliness.

She heard him come in, and she appeared with the teapot.
Magnal gave her a guarded but considering glance. She
looked as completely unruffled as the Greenbury dewpond on

a windless day, and the gust of Mrs. Wise's invasion appeared to have left no ripples. Magnal sat down. He refrained from mentioning the incident.

"Your garden is looking happy, Miss Allison."

"Yes, sir."

"Somehow - you get the same effect with your tea-table."

She was silent, and happening to glance up at her he discovered something that surprised him. Miss Allison's pale face seemed to have taken on sudden colour, and her eyes were darker and more liquid. ♣ She looked younger. ♣ Her skin had a more delicate texture. ♣ Damn it, ♣ how old was the woman - really? ♣ That white hair might be deceptive. ♣ It was rather a pleasant contrast when her grey eyes darkened. It made of her a Georgian dame with a prettily powdered head.

She was gone, and Magnal poured out his tea. He could suppose that good food, and clean air, and the peace of this solitary retreat had wiped some of those sterile years from the face of Miss Elizabeth Allison.

But just how old was she?

Space

At his London Club members sometimes asked each other "What has become of Magnal?" No one knew, and no one in particular cared. But one summer day Modred Magnal appeared in Pall Mall looking like a piece of old bronze, and with a pointed black beard which, according to one wit, made him look an interesting sort of scoundrel.

Magnal visited his wine-merchant, and wandered along Pall Mall and up St. James Street into Piccadilly. He took a look at Berkeley Square, and sat on a chair in the Green Park. Yes, London was a unique city, and all the more so when you did not visit it too often, or sleep in it. He thought of the peace of Lammas, its profound silences. No chattering fools banged the doors of motor-cars there at 2 a.m., and guffawed and made silly, alcoholic noises. These city folk did not understand silence. They were afraid of it, & disturbed by it. How strange to be disturbed by silence!

Yet, as he left the train at Melfont St. Giles, and passed through that comely village to take the road to Mistover he could twit himself with the accusation that his apartness was something of a compromise. He had begun with a tent and a canvas bath and nudity, and progressed into a gracious old house with Heal beds and a wine cellar, and a

Miss Elizabeth Allison to wait upon him. Well, and why not? Crude Nature was not your friend unless you went out to meet her as the Master, destroying her savage beasts and poisoning her filthy reptiles and her insects. Even so she could hold the lightning against you, and earthquakes, and tornadoes, and rain to ruin your crops. ~~Man had made himself more comfortable by out-witting or coercing Nature, and man's destiny - as in the Greten days - should be war against Nature and not against man. The whole trouble was man - ~~man's~~ man's spiritual starvation, and a boredom which accepted that rough-house called war. He had been taught to howl about his rights, and to forget about the thing called duty.~~

Moreover, regarded as a thinker, need a soft bed and a hot bath render man's meditations any less profound? Was it necessary for him to sit on an ant-heap or squat for hours in the dust with vermin upon him, in order to attain to that inward vision? Austerity - of a sort, certainly, but an austerity of the spirit. Surely a clean, warm, well-fed body should set the soul more free for transcendental things? Yes, Lammas could be considered as part of his philosophy.

Magnal turned aside to climb the Long Barrow and sit for a while on the sweet turf while he contemplated the landscape. How sleek and gracious the great hills looked in the evening light of summer! So, his friend Minos must have

seen them, save that they were less solitary. - Solitude! Would he tire of it? He thought not, for he did not live only in the world of the living, but also in the world of the so-called dead.

"Good night, my friend," and Magnal beat gently with his large fist on the earth coffin, "Peace be with you."

He arose and walked on towards Mistover, feeling himself part of these serene hills. They were like great bastions against the advent of evil things. So thought ~~Modred~~ Magnal in the innocence of his aloofness.

He came to Lammaas, and Bob rushed forth to him, and was fondled. Miss Allison was laying the table for his dinner. He surprised her in a flowery frock, and some of the surprise was his. He could have said to her A "My dear Miss Allison, - why, you look quite pretty."

What he did say was A "Had a peaceful day, Miss Allison?"

"Yes, sir. W And how is London?"

"Just - London. It's good to be back."

XIII.

It is now platitudinous to say that time is relative, and that things grow up and things grow down when the observer changes his view point. ~~Medred~~ Magnal might be studying the stars, and unearthing the mysterious dead, and writing a book upon the Mystics and Mysticism, but the one subject which he was not studying was ~~Medred~~ Magnal the man. An old friend, one James Westinghouse, who had made a pilgrimage with him through Thibet, and who was back in England after years of adventure, hunted Magnal down and appeared out of the blue at Lammas one autumn day. How many autumns had passed over a reinhabited Lammas need not be part of the story.

Jim Westinghouse had an eye for human detail, and a happy and reckless nature. The old folk would have called him gaillard, and he had been a bonnie fighter.

"Well, 'n old man, you seem pretty comfortable."

"I am."

"The little god of your own world."

"Where asses do not bray, or women do not incite you to swagger."

The humorous wrinkles sharpened about James Westinghouse's mischievous eyes.

"Well, if I do not ride an ass, * I sometimes ride a woman."

Mr. Westinghouse was interested in Medred Magnal's separative world, and in his friend's philosophy, but inwardly he was a secret observer and a kindly critic, and his observations were not without significance.

M. M. had put on fat.

He had lost much of his lean and laughing strenuousness.

Lammas possessed most comfortable arm-chairs and beds.

There was no bite in its temperature.

A few grey hairs betrayed themselves in that black and boisterous head.

M. M.'s conversation had become that of a spectator. Ulysses appeared to have furled his sail and shipped his oars.

Where were the world's Circes and Calypsos?

Magnal might dig up the dead, and write books upon them and their symbolism, but he seemed more with the dead than with the living.

The Lammas food might be simple, but it was exquisitely cooked and delicately served.

And the strange, silent, serene person who served him - was - none the less - woman.

Mr. Westinghouse was a little puzzled by Miss Elizabeth

Allison. He put her age at forty-three, whereas - in the beginning - ~~Medred~~ Magnal had planted her among the fifties. The white hair was deceptive, and so were the calm grey eyes. Somehow this woman had the chilly charm of a cold, bright day in Spring. And what was the position? Had Magnal acquired a cook, housekeeper, domestic slave, and sympathetic and consenting ~~w~~ friend, - all in one breath? ~~A~~ Mr. Westinghouse watched them with interest. It became evident to him that Magnal regarded Miss Elizabeth Allison as a valuable domestic asset, just that, and no more, or if there was more to it, ~~Medred~~ Magnal was not actively conscious of the obligation. With Miss Allison the emotional complex was very different, if delicately veiled. Mr. Westinghouse observed her looking at Magnal in a particular way when Magnal was not looking at her. It was a maternal glance, and much more than that. ~~Medred~~ Magnal was basking like a casual god in the calm light of this woman's profound and voiceless devotion.

Mr. Westinghouse did not remark upon the matter to Magnal, for that would have savoured of the impertinent complacency of Little Puddleton, and James Westinghouse was very much a man of the world. He came back to his native land perhaps once in five years, and the quality which

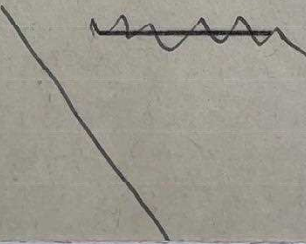
struck him most forcibly was England's smug self-satisfaction. It is said that the English are noted for crabbing their own show, but behind that assumption of mock modesty Little Puddleton is greasy and oiled with self-conceit. Mr. Westinghouse did dare to remark that Magnal had a most excellent cook, and his friend agreed with him.

"Yes, Miss Allison is - unique. ~~A woman of method.~~"

Mr. Westinghouse wondered how this quiet creature contrived to get through all the work ~~as~~ she did. She was up at six, and went to bed at eleven. Method - yes! Miss Allison might be unusually intelligent, and she had no one with whom she could waste her time in gossiping, but efficiency and intelligence were the crucible, but not the flame beneath it.

"Of course - I do a good deal. ~~By~~ Stoke the furnace. Run the engine and bring in coal, and keep the garden, and all that. ~~W~~ I expect my tameness makes you chuckle, James."

"Does one chuckle at such - virtue?"



XIII. Cont.

~~"I say, my lad! - Somehow I have grown out of
Singapore and Port Said. - I have come into harbour, and
it is a pretty peaceful haven."~~

Mr. Westinghouse wondered. He went away wondering. It seemed to him that ~~Moored~~ Magnal was taking too much for granted, and that in his sweet seclusion he had forgotten that life could play you disturbing tricks. Yes, just like a boy with a pea-shooter lurking behind a bush. Maybe, you had dozed off nicely, - when - ping - the hard seed smote your cheek.

It was one of those still, misty autumn days when the thing happened. Magnal had been working on Dead Man's Down, excavating a fine specimen of a pit-dwelling. He had unearthed the hearth-stone when the dimness of the pit in which he was working warned him that it was time to down tools. He left them there against the damp wall of soil, and climbing out, found the whole landscape like a grey ghost of itself. Mist was rising thickly in the valleys, and immense stillness prevailed. Almost it was possible to imagine that the material world was dissolving into primordial vapour, to reappear as some other, fourth dimensional scene.

Magnal stood for a moment, looking and listening

before moving off down a lynchet, that sloped towards Witch's Wood. He could see its beech trees dimly burning like a great pyre half smothered in its own smoke. If you believed that the dead walked, then in such a twilight world as this some restless shade might drift across your path.

Magnal had reached the edge of Witch's Wood, and was skirting it to cut across the valley towards the Mistbourne and the Long Barrow when he heard the sound of that strange singing. It shrilled out suddenly like the song of a bird, and it was so surprising and strange that he stood still. The voice was childish, and a girl's voice at that, and it made him think of some she-pixie singing in a haunted wood. It had a poignancy, a suggestion of fear, and there was no tangible tune to it, nor any words that he could recognise.

What - the devil?

He turned towards Witch's Wood, and almost instantly the singing ceased. So the creature had seen him? The creature had. Its sudden screams were like the crying of some terrified little animal, wild and uncontrolled, for, in the misty twilight Magnal, in his shorts and jerkin, must have looked like some hairy giant, a veritable apparition. He paused under the hanging beech boughs.

"Hallo, hallo, what's all this hullabaloo?"

The voice was man's, and the screaming ceased. Magnal pushed in under the curtain of leaves, looked and saw nothing.

"Hallo, where are you? Nothing to be scared about."

He became aware of movement. Something detached itself from the grey trunk of a tree. He saw a little white face. Some village child who had got lost on the Downs?

"Come along. I'm not an ogre."

The figure took shape.

"You won't hurt me?"

"Don't be silly. Come along out."

She came forward and paused. He saw a slim child with her stockings in wrinkles, and her very black hair hanging about her elvish little face. She had great black sloes for eyes. There were scratches on her legs where the stockings had slipped down, and her black frock seemed to have suffered from the brambles. In one hand she held a crumpled looking hat.

"Lost yourself, I suppose? Blackberrying, was it?"

She looked at him fixedly.

"No."

"Why were you singing?"

"Because I was frightened."

"So - that was why. W Nothing to be frightened about.
Where do you live?"

"Nowhere."

Magnal's black eyebrows went up. He stood looking at the girl. He smiled, and maybe he was smiling at the inward provocation. This wild country appeared to have a liking for dropping oddments of humanity upon him; creatures who came from nowhere.

"O, come now, you must have come from somewhere. You didn't drop out of the sky, did you?"

The girl's black eyes remained fixed upon his face.

"No. - But I call it nowhere."

"And what is or was nowhere?"

"The home."

Magnal laughed gently.

"How can home be nowhere, my dear?"

"It's an orphanage."

"Good lord! - And you've run away?"

"Yes."

"Where from?"

"Swinchester."

"But that's sixty miles away. W Do you mean to say you have tramped all the way from Swinchester?"

The girl nodded at him. And then, Magnal realised

that the child was trembling.

"You won't send me back? 4 I won't go back."

"As bad as all that, was it?"

"Yes."

"What's your name?"

"Joanna."

"Joanna - what?"

"Joanna Foster."

"Well, * Joanna, when did you last have a meal? I see by your mouth you have been eating blackberries."

"Yesterday * evening."

"Great Scott, my dear, that must be remedied."

The child attracted him. There might have been gypsy blood in her by her colouring, save that her pale little face contrasted with her very black eyes and hair. There was a sensitive wildness about her, something birdlike, even in her features, and when she moved it was with a kind of quick, fluttering grace. If she was of the People, then her heritage might have followed that of Hardy's Tess, and at the moment she was a little figure of tragedy.

"What you want is a good meal, Joanna, and a good bed. Not afraid of me, are you?"

Her black eyes, still steadily gazing, seemed to break into little crinkles of light.

"No."

She came to him, and put a hand in his. There was a wild and vivid naturalness about her, and nothing of the affected little exhibitionist exerting charm at the age of ten. That was Magnal's reading of her age and he was wrong.

"Tired, Joanna?"

"Yes."

"All right. What about a ride, pig-a-back?"

She was suddenly and strangely non-consenting, with a queer little dignity of her own, for she was nearly woman.

"I'd rather hold your hand."

Magnal was challenged, and liked the feeling.

"As your ladyship pleases. We haven't very far to go. Tell me, when did you run away from the orphanage?"

"A week ago."

"Sixty miles or so in a week! Where were you going?"

"Anywhere, to get as far away as I could."

"Like that, was it, How long have you been there?"

"Seven years."

"And how old are you, Joanna?"

"Thirteen."

That surprised him. She seemed small and childish for her age, but when he considered her small and delicate face, he divined in it a maturity that might explain many things.

Meanwhile she held his hand, but her oblique and upward glances were still questioning and a little fearful. It would seem that she had had cause to fear the creature - man, the creature that - of all God's creations - can be most cunningly cruel, and she had fled from him, even as Magnal himself had withdrawn from the crowd, but for different reasons. Magnal had no illusion about the mass of humanity. It could be just as brutal and greedy and selfish and sly as its forebears. Magnal was interested only in the exceptions, those other people who somehow dragged the human cloak out of the crowd's mud, and this girl appealed to him as an exception.

But what of Miss Elizabeth Allison?"

They had reached the dark alleyway in the great thicket of thorns, and suddenly Magnal felt the child's fingerstighten ^{on} ~~in~~ his. She flinched. What was this dark and mysterious place? He spoke to her gently.

"Nothing to be afraid of, Joanna. ^{by} There will be a kind lady waiting for you, and Bob the dog."

Her little sensitive face winced into a smile.

"Have you got a dog?"

"I have."

That seemed to console her, and how accusing was the reaction. An animal could be kinder and less menacing than

man. Her fingers relaxed; her muscles lost their tension. In the twilight she did not notice the ragged and empty buildings. A window shone out at them. Miss Allison was lighting up, and the click of the gate-latch was a signal. They heard Bob's welcoming bark.

"Bob, my lad, meet Miss Joanna Foster."

Bob was a gentleman's dog, and he behaved like one, for the girl's hands settled almost instantly on his hairy head, and through the tangle of his hair he peered at her and laughed. "Hallo, who are you? - Anyhow you're pretty." The girl had no fear of the dog, and their heads were together when Miss Elizabeth Allison came upon the scene. She stood quite still, gazing, and for a moment her grey eyes were enigmatic. A child, and a girl - at that!

Magnal felt the tension of that still figure, and his words were half humorous.

"Here is a little lady who has lost her way, and has been living on blackberries and hazel-nuts."

Miss Allison's grey eyes met his. They seemed to ask a question, a question that ~~Modred~~ Magnal had not yet put to himself.

"Lost ^?"

"Yes, in more ways than one. - I think a meal is indicated."

Miss Allison's glance passed to the girl. Her lips moved. For a second or two they suggested severity, suspicion. She might have said * "And a bath - I think," but again ~~Medred~~ Magnal's voice eased the tension.

"Joanna, this is Miss Allison. She is going to be kind to you."

The girl's black eyes lifted to the woman's face, and perhaps Miss Elizabeth Allison saw something of her self in them, that hunted self which had found refuge here.

"Come, my dear *."

The voice was gentle, and suddenly the child put up her face to the woman. Her lips trembled, but no words came, and Miss Allison kissed her.

XIV.

Modred Magnal was to write in his daybook - "I fear nothing in this world but my own silly, over-sensitive conscience," and those words were at the back of all his philosophy and of his mode of living. He did not fear man, but exploitation by man, abetted by his too sensitive self, which, in the gamble of motives, would dare to divine the best and discover the worst. That is why the intuitive self in him chose to live apart, wise in its suspicions, proud in its separativeness. That fastidious conscience of his would always - in the vulgar parlance - make of him the world's sucker.

"That is why" Magnal wrote, "I, being sensitive silk, do not wish to have coarse fustian about me to rub me raw. I will not play at being 'mass-man's boss, to be hated in secret, and laughed at behind my back. Let the stone and the crawling things under it be for others."

And here was a child, a child who had fled from the things he had eluded! He watched her sitting at the kitchen table, eating her first meal, and his mood was one of surprise and compassion. She was not of the trough. Even though her young hunger was evident, there was a nice grace about her eating. She had a sensitive little mouth, ~~not a~~

"Enjoying it, Joanna?"

"Yes."

Miss Allison, pouring soup into a little silver tureen for the Master, looked at the child, and smiled, one of those inward, self-questioning smiles, ~~that are revealing.~~

Said Magnal to her as she served him, "Can you manage a shake-down for her - tonight?"

She could. There was the spare room.

"Rather pathetic - that kid. Like a bird blown against your window."

Miss Allison sighed. Yes, just as she had been.

Lammas dallied with its decision.

Miss Allison, waking at her usual early hour, found that Joanna was up before her, and was standing at the window in one of Miss Allison's night-dresses which trailed around her feet. Joanna was looking at this strange new world, a little hazy and mysterious, the grey walls, the yellow thatch of the barn and outbuildings, the saffron coloured thorns, the vast dim hills. It seemed to her very lovely. And how different from that yellow brick barrack of a building at Swinchester, with its communal coarseness, its repressive and ^{any} imaginative severity, its secret cruelties exercised upon a sensitive creature by sadistic little hussies. Joanna was so deep in contemplating it that she

did not hear Miss Allison rise in her bed and observe that small figure in its immense white sack.

"Awake early, Joanna."

The child turned. Her face had the glamour of the scene upon which she had been gazing.

"Yes, isn't it lovely."

"Very lovely."

"Can I dress and go down?"

"Of course, my dear. A Your stockings will have to be seen to."

"I can do without them - this morning. A Can I help downstairs?"

"Of course, my dear" said Miss Allison, "if you want to."

"I do."

When Magnal looked out of his window he saw the bare-legged child standing at the garden gate and gazing at the autumnal thorns with their red berries like drops of blood. He had let Bob out, and she, having left the porch door open, the dog joined her. She bent down and kissed him, and was licked on the nose. Bob began a playful gambol. He pawed at the gate, and the girl opened it. Bob barked and pranced around. What about a scamper? And here was something young to play with. Magnal saw those white legs go flashing down the green way with the dog bouncing and

barking beside them, and Medred Magnal was challenged.

"I suppose we shall have to send the girl back."

That seemed a treacherous sort of trick, and he considered it while shaving. He heard this girl and the dog return, and the voices of Joanna and Miss Allison below stairs. The old clock's ticking suggested surprise, pleasant surprise. Something was different. There was youth in the house.

When Magnal came downstairs to collect his early tea he found Joanna lighting the kitchen fire. The early kettle was heated on an oil stove, and its spout was steaming.

"Hullo, * Joanna. Found a job?"

She looked a little flushed and excited, and her dark eyes shone.

"Yes. * It's fun."

"Good for you, my dear. Life ought to be fun."

Breakfast. Miss Allison, arriving with porridge, and bacon and eggs, was asked to close the door.

"Sit down, Elizabeth. - I'm posed."

Miss Allison sat down by the window.

"Suppose we give the child a few days holiday, and then - do something - about her? Any objection?"

"None."

"It seems a dirty trick to pack her back there. Has she talked to you about the place?"

"Not yet."

"Perhaps she will. I don't like putting an escaped bird back in a cage."

Miss Allison looked thoughtful.

One, two, three days passed, and Joanna was still with them, and helping ^{Miss Allison} her with the housework. The girl was a creature of quick reactions and high temper, but so sensitive to her surroundings that Lammas affected her as strangely as the orphanage had done, but with such a difference. To Joanna Lammas was an exquisite place, beautiful and strange and free. She liked to look at lovely things and to touch them, and at Swinchester there had been so little beauty. How lovely were the red berried thorns, and the grass alleyway, and the mysterious ruined cottages, and the great hills, gold or grey. What a lovely creature was Bob! What a wonderful person was Modred Magnal! She looked up at him with black eyed awe. The great room in which he ate and smoked his pipe and read was a sacred place. She trod softly in the passage. She seemed to know instinctively that he hated noise, vulgar laughter, silly

chattering voices, just as she shrank from such discords.

Magnal noticed this restraint. The girl was very quiet about the house. She did not sing or whistle or run noisily upstairs. She was like a little black mouse. And yet, he inferred that this child was high spirited, and could be passionate, for she had dared to rebel, and take to the open country, and endure for those sixty miles. There must have been a hue and cry, and she had eluded it.

"That's a very quiet piece of goods, Elizabeth."

Miss Allison was still looking thoughtful.

"I think she has been frightened."

"Well, she had the courage to break away. - She's not worrying you, I hope?"

"No, Mr. Magnal."

Miss Elizabeth Allison could not make up her mind about Joanna, or to put it more honestly she could not yet harmonise conflicting emotions. She might be an unusual woman and a religious one, and like Magnal, something of a law unto herself, but the coming of Joanna might be a blessing or a curse. It just depended upon how you felt about it. Help in the house by a girl who was sympathetic to her and who was not an emotional menace would be welcome to this hard worked and devoted Martha, but Miss Allison

had come to love her sweet separativeness, as ~~Medred~~ Magnal loved his. On Magnal's shelves she had discovered that remarkable book, an uncomfortable book which the Victorians had sought to ignore, Winwood Reade's "Martyrdom of Man", and she had read it and accepted it. For, Miss Elizabeth Allison feared man, and woman. He was a feral beast, a herd animal, indifferent or cruel, to whom any-thing exceptional was an offence to the herd-man's ^{vanity} variety. Sometimes he slew his prophets or his exceptional exceptions, or sought to ignore them, and let them rot in obscurity and indigence. Christ had died on the cross to save fools from themselves, and Elizabeth Allison might well have been one of those devoted women who had dared to stand by the dying Christ, when His men disciples had ratted lest the herd ^{rend} should reach them.

Miss Allison could not make up her mind about this young intruder.

It was made up for her by Joanna.

Setting out to sweep and garnish her chapel, and to kneel for five minutes before the altar she found the girl following her.

"May I come too, Miss Allison?"

"Yes, my dear, if you want to."

Miss Allison unlocked the oak door. It creaked upon

its hinges, and Elizabeth Allison was always meaning to oil the hinges and forgetting it.

"The hinges need a little attention, Joanna. I must try and remember."

Miss Allison had with her a soft broom and a smaller brush and a dustpan. Joanna had offered to carry the broom, and the work to be done was obvious. Joanna set to work with the broom, looking up now and again at the windows and the dim and ancient roof. She was silent. Miss Allison, leaving her dustpan and brush on the seat of one of the remaining pews, went to kneel before the altar. For a moment or two Joanna watched her, and then, leaning her broom against the wall, she went to kneel beside Miss Allison.

Miss Allison gave the child one quick, sidelong glance, and then continued with her silent worship, yet she was conscious of the figure beside her, its two hands together, its head bowed. Was the child playing up to the occasion? Miss Allison was aware of a twinge of self-shame. Might not Joanna be feeling as she had felt when first she had entered this little sanctuary.

Miss Allison prayed.

"God keep me from mean thoughts and mean motives."

She rose, and Joanna rose with her, to resume her

sweeping. There were faded flowers to be removed, and that was Elizabeth Allison's task. She had brought with her some sprigs of holly and beech foliage, and she placed them in the vase upon the altar. Joanna had swept the dust into a little heap by the door, and Miss Allison came to collect it in her dustpan. Neither of them had uttered a word.

"You can throw that away, Joanna."

"Outside, but not where the graves are?"

Miss Allison's eyes rested gently on her. So, the girl was sensitive enough to understand that.

"Yes, my dear, outside the wall."

Miss Allison was about to lock the door when Joanna returned from emptying her dustpan.

"If you leave me the key, Miss Allison, couldn't I oil the hinges for you?"

"Yes, Joanna, you could. A feather would do."

Miss Allison might be feeling that any creaky hinge in her own spirit had been given its soothing oil.

They returned to Lammas, and Elizabeth Allison supplied this wise virgin with oil for her lamp of service, filling a small bottle from the drum in the engine-house. Lammas now kept hens, and when a bird was killed, not to be eaten but to be buried, for both Magnal and Miss Allison could neither

of them bring themselves to pluck, gutt and eat a bird that had become familiar, & Miss Allison saved some of the wing feathers for Magnal's pipes, and one such feather was presented to Joanna. She set forth upon her task, but the persuading of oil to work its way into the rusty hinges was less simple than it seemed.

She was kneeling and anointing the lower hinge when ~~Modred~~ Magnal passed that way, bound for an old track that crossed what had been the fields of Lamma farm. Over the low stone wall he saw the kneeling girl, and wondered what she was doing there.

"Hallo, & Joanna, & what's the job?"

She turned quickly with a sudden colour in her face, the oil in one hand, the feather in the other.

"The hinges squeak. & I'm trying to oil them for Miss Allison."

"Not so easy as it looks, Joanna."

"No, they are all rusted up."

"Like most people's minds. & Well, if you get rid of the squeak by the time I come back, & I'll give you a - "

He was about to say shilling, but he changed the word for kiss.

The girl's lashes flickered. Her red lips showed the whiteness of her teeth.

"I'll try to earn it, sir."

"By Jove, some day, Joanna, there won't be much earning," and Magnal passed on, not realising that he had uttered a personal prophecy.

It was on the morning of the seventh day that Magnal and Miss Allison held council together. Some decision had to be made and put into action. Doubtless, there were certain legalities that needed considering; that Ass, the Law might bray in the faces of all three of them unless the silly beast was placated with the conventional carrot. Swinchester had better be notified as to the safety and the whereabouts of the missing child.

"What - then, Elizabeth? You are the person who is chiefly concerned."

"Does she worry you, sir?"

"No, & I can't say she does. & Besides, you really ought to have help. & The thing we used to call Providence seems to have intervened."

"We could try it, sir."

"Someone will have to speak to the girl. - Will you, or - ?"

Was the great man shirking the issue, and betraying that moral cowardice which manifests in the male when some

delicate domestic issue has to be faced?

"I think you ought to, sir."

"Ought I? Very well, I will."

Joanna was in the garden, gathering the last nuts from the autumnal hazels in a corner of the orchard. That pest, the grey squirrel, had not crossed the downs to Mistover, and the nuts could ripen as they pleased and fall from the withering husks into the grass. Magnal found the girl gathering the brown cobs into a basket, picking them out of the wet grass. She did not hear him, and when he spoke to her she turned a startled, frightened face. She had expected her crisis, and it was here.

"Joanna, my dear, I want to talk to you about - that place - at Swinchester."

He saw her straighten, and holding the basket, gaze at him with big black eyes. Then her face grew tragic. She dropped the basket, and rushing to him, clasped him with anguished hands.

"Oh, don't send me back, don't send me back."

Magnal was strangely moved.

"Are you happy here, Joanna?"

"Yes, so happy. - It's lovely."

He gathered her up, and looking in her face, kissed her.

"Very well. We will see what we can do about it."

She closed her eyes. A kind of ecstasy seemed to spread in a soft languor over her face. She surrendered to him. Her hands clung about his neck.

"Oh, - let me stay. " I'll help. - I can help."

And again Magnal kissed her.

"So it shall be, Joanna. " I'll deal with the people at Swinchester. Come on, " I'm afraid you have spilt the nuts. " I'll help to put them back in the basket."

A lady who signed herself The Commandant, a title that was not ^Uinsignificant, replied to Modred Magnal's letter, and peremptorily so. The girl, ^JF. Foster, was to be returned immediately to the institution where proper disciplinary action would be taken. Magnal's black mane bristled when he read that letter, the product of a She-Prussian. He did not reply to it, but got out the car and drove out to give battle.

He found the orphanage on the outskirts of Swinchester, a bald, yellow-brick building in the midst of an asphalt playground. Iron railings surrounded it. There was a porter's lodge, and Magnal rang the bell. He desired to see the official in charge. Oh, did he! Well, that might be his pleasure, but not everybody's. Magnal sent in his card, and on it he had scribbled "The interview concerns

Miss Joanna Foster."

Miss Joanna Foster indeed! He was ^{assumed} ~~assumed~~ into the presence. It was long and lean and wore pince-nez. It's hair was dragged back tightly from a bulging forehead. It assumed towards Magnal an air of myopic authority. Magnal regarded it, and thought - "Gosh, woman, you - are - repulsive."

"I presume, sir " it said "that you have come to arrange about the return of the girl Foster."

"On the contrary" said Magnal, "I am here to do just the opposite."

Then, feathers were up, and this she-cock began to crow. Magnal sat quite still saying nothing, and smiling murderously at the lady. When she had had her say, his counter-thrust was quick and caustic.

"Very well. " We will make a public matter of the case. Will you give me the names of your chairman and secretary. " I will get in touch with them at once."

The lady nibbled at him.

"I'll call my husband. " He manages the male side - ."

"By all means call him, madam. " You see, this is going to be a very serious business for you."

"It" flounced off and fetched its mate, a fish-like person, flabby and unctuous, who was scared when he saw

~~Modred~~ Magnal's Jovian and stormy head. The man had more fish-sense than the woman. This - was a gentleman not to be quarrelled with. He had his hook in the institution's mouth, and he did not look like letting go.

"We were concerned, sir, about the affair."

"Just - hysteria," said It. "The girl has always been - ."

"Sensitive." said Magnal.

And then he delivered his ultimatum, curtly and ruthlessly. Was he to be obstructed and compelled to make a public exposure of the case, or would Fish and It institute the necessary formalities? * No doubt there were formalities. His house-keeper was ready to take the girl and train her. The orphanage committee could send some representative to Lammas to satisfy the institution's conscience as to the suitability of the place. That was the position. And Magnal added that it would be tactless of Fish and It to adopt an attitude of hostility.

They did not.

The Committee of Management gave its ultimate and gracious consent to the girl J. Foster taking service at Lammas Farm.

XV.

All this happened when the leaves began to fall.

On the morning when the formalities were completed Joanna had gone to sweep out the chapel. It had indeed become the private chapel of My Lord Modred of Mistover. Magnal, who had tipped the postman who had ridden from Melfont St. Giles, went out to find Joanna, and in an old apple tree by the gate a robin was singing. Magnal waved a hand to the bird. Four thousand or so years ago the same robin might have sung to my Lord Minos of the Long Barrow.

He found the chapel door open, but no Joana. He called to her. And then he saw her against the background of the old red berried thorns whose leaves were falling one by one or two by two like drops of amber. Did trees weep for the passing of the year? Joanna had been kneeling by the headstone of that other Magnal, and picking the moss and lichen from it with an old knife.

He waved the letter at her.

"Joanna, here's your Magna Carta. - You stay with us."

For a moment she stood still. Her lips looked as red as the thorn berries in her little white face, her eyes were black sloes. Then, she came running to him. Almost, she seemed breathless.

"Is it true?"

"Yes, my dear."

"I can stay here always?"

Magnal laughed.

"Time and always - are relative. ♡ Some day, - perhaps - ."

She dropped on her knees and tried to kiss his hand. How unmodern was this! ♡ He bent down, turned her pretty face up and kissed it. Was he not the great lord to this beggar maid.

"May you be happy, Child."

Suddenly she slipped from him. She ran to the chapel door, and disappeared into the black inwardness of the place, and Magnal followed softly and looked in. She was kneeling by the altar, head bowed, hands together, like some daughter of St. Louis, or the Maid herself listening to God at Domremy.

With a movement of the right hand Magnal made the sign of the cross, and walked out of the little graveyard into the lane. How catholic were the falling leaves, and a robin singing, and a passionate girl-child on her knees, and the blood-crowned thorns! Why bring in history? What was history but a pattern in some old book whose pages were always turning, and St. Francis or John Keats came to life again in spite of mass-man and his demagogues. Hail the sun,

salute Apollo, ring the sanctus bell, chant orisons, all this was but part of the great mystery, manifestations of the martyrdom of man, the poor fool who listened to clap-trap at street corners, and had no vision of his own.

Then, just where the thorns came close and almost touched their red berried fingers ~~Medred~~ Magnal met Elizabeth Allison walking towards the chapel. Her face was serene, for Elizabeth Allison had fought and won a victory over self.

"I've told her, Elizabeth," said Magnal.

Miss Allison bent her head to him and smiled.

"She's in - your - chapel, on her knees. ⁴ I think the sacrament is yours."

There were domestic deficiencies and others to be remedied, and Magnal drove Miss Allison and Joanna into Blenborough. This was a woman's job, and his part was to produce the money, and explore the ancient corners of Blenborough while the women shopped. He had given Miss Allison certain hints, and the right to be lavish. "Get the girl a pretty frock or two. I don't like women in uniform." The little back bedroom opposite Miss Allison's was to be furnished for Joanna, and Elizabeth Allison chose a simple little whitewood suite painted cream. The wardrobe possessed a mirror. Meanwhile, Joanna was looking into a milliner's mirror and seeing

herself in a pretty, flowery frock and a little black hat that sat on her head - just so.

"May I keep the frock on, Miss Allison?"

"Yes, my dear, I think so."

Other fascinations were to follow, new undies, stockings, shoes, aprons, a rain-coat, and dull but essential gum-boots. Joanna did look at herself in the mirror while her old black frock was being made into a parcel. She had shed certain hateful memories with that frock. And how would her lord and master like her in the new one?

He liked her very well. He was sitting in the car, reading, when Miss Allison and Joanna returned, full of parcels.

"I'm afraid we have kept you waiting a long time, sir."

Magnal looked up from his book, and saw that Miss Allison also had a new hat, and that it suited her, but the transfiguration of Joanna was more than mere literature. The child seemed to have disappeared in the miniature woman, somehow conscious of comeliness, but happily so, and liking it. Joanna's eyes were bright, and her face was apple-blossom.

"Hallo, we are grown up, Joanna!"

Miss Allison looked at him a little anxiously. Had she exceeded her instructions? But Joanna's little secret

self was singing. She saw that her lord and master's eyes found her good to look upon.

"Splendid! ♪ Your choice, ♪ Elizabeth? - I like your new hat."

Miss Allison blushed. ♪ Now, here was a man whom women could cherish, a man who was never mean about money, and who hailed your little vanities and praised them.

"I'm afraid there are some more parcels, sir. - I got you half a Stilton cheese and some Bath Oliver biscuits, and tinned peaches. - And that special marmalade."

"You think of everything, ♪ Elizabeth. ♪ I'll come and help carry."

So, the car was loaded up, and so considerably so that Joanna had to sit in Miss Allison's lap. They rattled out of Blenborough High Street, past the great grey church, and the Abbot's Hospital, and took the Downland road. Magnal's car was growing rather decrepit and was apt to falter on the hills, and its hood leaked in wet weather. ♪ Why not a new car with all this newness about? And yet he had an affection for this old vehicle. It was like the family coach.

road to change a wheel, only to discover that the spare wheel's tube was airless. He applied the pump to it, only to hear a significant and hopeless hissing. His need was a patch or a new inner tube. Melfont St. Giles possessed a garage, and Magnal walked off in search of help.

Melfont St. Giles' South Street was not the village's show-piece, and its somewhat squalid cottages were inhabited by Melfont St. Giles' definitely lower orders. Magnal had parked his car outside a public-house, The Magnet, an excellent name for such a lure. There were two or three loafers on the pavement, and a scattering of idle women at cottage doors. The inhabitants of South Street had so little internal life to interest them that they would have come forth to see a dog scratch himself. One of the loafers slouched across and peered through the talc side-curtain. He saw two faces, and his own face was within two feet of theirs.

Miss Allison sat austere aloof under the inspection, but Joanna looked and then looked away. What a repulsive face the man had, red and blotchy, with orange-peel skin on its nose. The fellow must have felt the girl's

"That there chap's car from Mistover. There's a gal inside. All dressed up they be."

One of the women sniggered.

"Maybe he likes 'em young."

The man winked.

"She don't look sixteen yet, but t'other's a bit on the tough side."

More sniggers. The man spat, and then blew his nose on his fingers.

"Looks like a feller who wants plenty o' meat."

"Oo-er" said one of the ladies. "I reckon that's why he lives in a place like that. I had a word last week with the gal who works at Bareacres. She'd come in to do a bit of shoppin'. She says to me - she says - "

But the niceness of rumour can be inferred.

It took the local garage half an hour to fit a new inner tube, and during the interlude Miss Allison and Joanna engaged the public gaze. It was extraordinary how many idle people paused and peered in through the side-screens. Miss Allison sat stiff and straight. She did not appreciate being examined in that way, like an animal in a cage, and the simile stirred up unhappy memories.

made her even more sensitive to such scrutinies. Her secret dread was that some day she might be recognised and see the pointing finger and the busy lips, "Why, that's Mrs. Peters, the woman who murdered her husband." The peace and aloofness of Lammas had quickened this sensitiveness, and she was like some shy animal, at ease in some green solitude, but scared of the haunts of men. Even her shopping expeditions to Blenborough were undertaken with secret shrinkings and self reproofs that urged her not to be a fanciful fool.

Joanna was more combative.

"Miss Allison."

"Yes, my dear?"

"If anybody else comes and stares I'll put my tongue out."

Miss Allison winced.

"I shouldn't do that, Joanna."

Joanna, glancing round into Miss Allison's face, was surprised by its queer, stiff look.

"No, " I won't - really. " I was only joking."

Said Elizabeth "It doesn't do to joke, dear, with

thought "What if this girl knew? Would she sit happily here? What should I see in her eyes? I wonder whether I ought to tell her?" She was silently and painfully considering these questions when Magnal reappeared, carrying the spare wheel in one big hand as though it weighed no more than a spider's web. How strong was the Master, both in the flesh and the spirit, and if in her eyes there was the look of the devotee, she did not need to justify it. She would speak to Magnal of her problem, and leave the decision in his strong, and magnanimous hands.

The wheel had to be changed and Magnal got the jack out from the back locker. The gentleman with the orange-peel nose, sighting a possible sixpence and a drink, slouched across and offered service.

"Can I give yer a 'and, guv'nor?"

Magnal looked at him.

"Not Wiltshire, are you?"

"Me?"

"More like Elephant and Castle. Here's a tanner. Go and get a drink. I can manage, thanks."

The man accepted the sixpence, held it in the palm of a dirty hand, and eyed it thoughtfully.

"I didn't, my friend."

"You don't want a man up at your place, do yer?"

"No. ^W I'm afraid I don't."

"Don't mind me askin'?"

"Not at all."

The wheel was changed, the jack put away. Magnal found a duster and wiped his hands. South Street observed him, the women with the inevitable partialities of sex.

"How would 'ee like he for a night?" asked one lady.

"Coo," was the reply - "I be'nt out for ^{turns} turns."

Melfont St. Giles melted away into the autumn mist. The great hills had serene grey foreheads. Magnal drove with discretion over the rough old track, having been warned that his tyres were not impeccable.

"Either a new set, ^A Elizabeth, or a new car. ⁺ Interesting place, Melfont South Street. - Well, if it is somebody's fault, is it ours?"

Miss Allison asked a question.

"Do you think one can alter people?"

"That is where the dear ^{fandits} prudits stumble. They think they can transform human nature. Let 'em try."

Bob was waiting for them, a dog who had much to say

honest eyes from those of some cadging, snooping sot! Magnal set about unloading stores, and Joanna came to help him, while Miss Allison prepared tea.

Magnal shouldering a sugar-box full of grocer's stores smiled down at Joanna.

"Not in that frock, my dear."

"But can't I carry - ?"

"The old chariot is not too clean. ♣ Take Bob for a run. He has earned it."

Before dinner that evening Miss Allison lit the parlour fire. She had made up her mind as to the occasion, and when Magnal had dined, and was settled before the fire with book and pipe and coffee, she sent Joanna upstairs to turn down beds and draw curtains.

"May I speak to you for a moment, sir?"

"Why, of course, Elizabeth. What is it?"

"I want your advice."

"Sit down."

But Miss Allison remained standing.

"Do you think I ought to tell Joanna?"

"Tell her?"

look up at Miss Allison. Her face was in the shadow, but its pale seriousness touched him. So, this silent woman still suffered from bitter and haunting memories.

"Too much conscience, Elizabeth. That is your trouble - and mine. Leave the past to the past."

She was silent for some seconds.

"But if the girl should - ?"

"Why should she? And if she did - ? What matters is the present, what one is and does with one's daily life. - That's how I see it, - Elizabeth. Who could accuse you of being anything but what you are."

"You mean, sir - ?"

"Look into Bob's eyes and see what you see in them. That's not a bad test. What would you see in them?"

Miss Allison appeared to draw a deep breath. She had no need to answer that question.

"Thank you, sir. I understand. I am very happy here."

"And so am I, Elizabeth, and largely thanks to you."

Magnal's happy, static state. Doubtless their diagnosis would have been vulgarly Freudian, and in accord with the moral standards of Melfont St. Giles South Street, ~~or that of the prudish prophetess of Camden Tracey~~. Here was a great, restless animal, suddenly become soft and tame, and content to vegetate in calcareous monotony. Maybe the chalk of Wiltshire had got into Magnal's blood. The fact remains that somehow he had discovered peace and the satisfactions of simple things, the cult of the spade and the scythe and the saw, to say nothing of the pen. The unfretted freedom of these Downs was to him a ~~serene~~ solace. Here he could think, and dream and feel himself near to the inevitable mystery. He was not understandable in the terms of modern or mediocre man. He had a world of his own, other than the world of those who go in blinkers.

"What on earth does the fellow do with himself?"

What did he not do - upon and in the earth? For Magnal was discovering the fascination of digging up and divining that old dead world. It was more than a mere hobby; it was - in a sense - an obsession. He was not disinterring mere

To two creatures who were prejudiced in believing him to be the magnanimous Lord and Master, nothing that he did was anything but good. Joanna might wonder at this strange business of digging into mounds and pits, and at the growing collection of objects in the great barn which Magnal had converted into a museum. Flint implements, pieces of pottery, beads, bones, arrow-heads, bronze tools, Joanna wondered about them, but did not question their importance. That which was important to Modred Magnal was somehow important to her. Everything in this new world of her's was lovely, her little room with its pretty furniture and its window looking over the barn roof to the great hills. It was warm - was this old house, and snug and peaceful, full of beautiful things, and Joanna was made for beauty. It was burgeoning in her own body, as well as in her soul. What was work in this house was but love's labour, for the life of Lammas had a virtue of its own. To Magnal those who worked for him and with him were friends, and he a fellow worker. Joanna was growing into a tall, slim, red-lipped beauty, with dark and smouldering eyes and midnight hair, but to Magnal she was still the child, familiar and

were douse and quiet. If she romped less with Bob, she did not love him less.

The winter passed and the spring came. Joanna had discovered, or rediscovered a virtue in herself. It was for line and for colour. She had her sketchbook and drawing-pad, and when asked at Christmas what she would like as a present she had asked for paints and brushes. Magnal was interested. Artistry - what? Had she anything to show him? She had. A study of the old barn, another of the thorns and chapel, bits of things in black and white, the Mistover Long Barrow at sunset.

Magnal was surprised by her work. Why had she been so secret about it?

"Saints alive, w Joanna, who taught you this?"

"Nobody."

"Taught yourself, & what? The only royal road. Go on with it, my dear."

He was looking at one of her sketches, and he did not see the quick flush upon her face.

XVI.

Just above Witch's Wood a little green plateau jutted out like a broad shelf from the slopes of Greenbury. Below it spread the tops of the beech trees, and above it the great heave of the hill sheltered it from the north east. The path leading up to the dewpond crossed this British alp, and Magnal had paused often on this sunny, sheltered spot to look down into the tops of the beeches. What a perfect site for a house! The thought had crossed Magnal's mind. The grass was always green here as though some underground spring seeped down and through into the wood below.

One morning he found that a rabbit had begun a bury here. A little scar of scraped out soil showed on the green turf. Magnal turned aside to look at it. He saw the little black pellets, rabbits' ^udoing, but he saw something more, a reddish, weather-worn fragment of baked earth. For a moment he stood and stared, and then he dived for the thing, picked it up, and held it in the hollow of his hand.

Ye gods, a piece of Roman tile!

He was sure of it. - So, there may have been a house here, as he had dreamed, a Roman villa, the home of some

He stood looking

grass? He was wise as to the significance of such a pattern, if - indeed - he was not imagining what he wished to see. Above the crumbling foundations of old walls the grass grew less lavishly.

So excited was he by the find that he came pelting back to Lammas for a spade. Blessed be the rabbit which had scraped out that revealing fragment, though Magnal proposed to spoil the beast's labour by digging in the self-same spot. But he had to tell his news. He appeared at the kitchen window where Miss Allison was making pastry with Joanna as an understudy, and over the window-sill he thrust a large hand.

"Guess what I've found."

There was a boyishness about this big man that warmed the hearts of women. Elizabeth Allison looked at his face, and his closed fingers, and gave it up.

"Just - that," said Magnal, and displayed the treasure.

Miss Allison scrutinised it, and Joanna's dark eyes joined hers. "Just a bit of old red brick! Why was my Lord so excited about it?"

"Found it on Greenbury just above Witch's Wood where a

"What is it, sir?"

"A piece of Roman brick, my child. I always had a feeling that round here - somewhere - Rome had left its mark. I'm off to dig."

Miss Allison was wise as to such enthusiasms.

"Would you like - ?"

"What a telepathic person you are, Elizabeth. Yes, I should."

"Sandwiches and cheese and a bottle of beer?"

"Splendid. I "

"If you are in a hurry, Joanna could bring them up."

"Splendid," said Magnal again, and dashed for the toolshed.

Miss Allison looked at Joanna, and Joanna looked at Elizabeth Allison. There was a mutual comprehension and sympathy in these feminine glances. Then, Miss Allison went on with her pastry-making, and with a little smile in her eyes.

Said Joanna "He does seem excited about his old piece of brick."

"Yes, bless him." said the woman.

for a moment to look at the great trees. Witch's Wood was wearing its young green; the smooth grey trunks were crowned with their drooping canopies, and on this May morning Witch's Wood was no place of sinister meaning. It might have been Lob's Wood to Joanna, for, in wandering into it she had walked into a new world. She turned and climbed the broad turf-walk which slanted upwards and obliquely towards the plateau. Magnal had reclimbed it, apostrophising himself for not having divined the nature of this grassy track, whose significance was now obvious. Joanna found him knee-deep in a creditable hole, with a pile of earth flung out upon the grass. He was in his shirt-sleeves, bare-headed, and sweating with the strenuousness of his labour, ~~and the thrill of his discovery.~~

Joanna drew near and stood still. He had not heard her footsteps on the soft turf. He was bending down now in the hole, and rubbing at something with his fingers, his great black head close to the soil. The girl watched him, and her ~~deep dark~~ eyes were the eyes of woman.

He came upright, with something in his fingers, and

"Look."

She stood on the edge of the pit and gazed. She saw a low flint wall with bands of red running through it, and a queer looking squarish tube upright and embedded in the wall.

"A house?"

"What was a house fifteen hundred years ago, Joanna. God bless that rabbit! - Look at this."

He showed her a little red cube.

"See - that. I'm blessed if the little beast didn't set me at work right over the winter-room. There's a tessellated pavement here. ¶ And look at that flue."

He pointed to the red box-tile in the wall.

"The hypocaust must be down below. - That's a warm air flue. - Come and kiss me, my dear."

Some of these long words might be meaningless to Joanna, but that impulsive salute was otherwise. She leaned over towards him. She closed her eyes. Her lips met his and were warm and melting. She might have been a Roman girl, with a tinge of nut-brown in her skin, and more than that in the blood of it.

This discovery upon the flank of Greenbury opened another chapter in Joanna's life. ~~Medred~~ Magnal was taking this new adventure in archæology with strenuous enthusiasm. Mr. Bull of Blenborough was called in to erect a wooden hut upon the site where Magnal could store his tools and finds until the objects were moved into the Lammas barn. In brief Mr. Bull was warned that a strange contract might be his, to re-erect a Roman villa, or at least to arrange for the protection of precious pavements from frost and rain. No corrugated iron, and be darned to it, but heather thatch or old tiles, and rough hewn timber. Any building here must needs be part of the landscape, and of the same temper as Witch's Wood.

Mr. Bull was interested. He stood on the edge of a trench and looked down at the blue and white ^{drain} terrace of a Roman pavement, or rather - the outer border of it, and Mr. Bull rubbed his chin.

"Are you going to dig up the whole site, sir?"

"I am."

"All by yourself?"

earth had to be sieved for possible finds, every piece of excavating sketched and measured, and careful records kept. Not at once did either she or Magnal appreciate her capacities. Could she not help him with the sieve, shake the riddle and pick out treasure while he spaded out the earth? She could. And she could keep notes for him, and make drawings of the site and of the various objects he uncovered.

She was sitting on the grass above one of his trenches. The day was growing old, and suddenly Magnal saw her against the sunset, and paused, pick in hand to gaze and make yet another discovery. Why, of course! Why had he not seen it before? Joanna in her dark slimness, in lightness of limb, in the poise of that sensitive little head was Mediterranean, ~~once~~^{no} solid and sensual Roman wench, but a Cretan girl. She belonged here, not to Rome, but to that older and gentler race, full of the joy of life and its artistry, music and the dance, wine, corn and oil. She was before Mycenae and its golden bravos, before martial man had begun to swagger and boast of the blood on his sword. She was one with old friend Minos who lay sleeping in the Long Barrow. How strange!

eyes. He was holding something that he had found, a part of an earthenware Roman lamp.

"Do you think you could draw that?"

"Yes."

"Why not? ♣ When the monumental book appears - Miss Joanna Foster will do the illustrations."

Her long lashes flickered.

"Could I? - I'd love that. ♣ May I have it to draw?"

He moved along the trench, and passed it to her.

"My dear, a question. Did you come out of Cornwall or Wales?"

She looked puzzled.

"I don't know. ♣ I believe my great-grandmother was French."

"Ha, ♣ was she! The Midi or Provence, Albi. The blood of the troubadours, and long before that. Long before the Greeks came to Provence. ♣ How do you fancy all that, Joanna?"

Her white teeth showed between her very red lips.

"It sounds - wonderful."

Joanna's day became divided and so did her allegiance. Half her time was given to Modred Magnal, and half to Elizabeth Allison. There were elements in this double relationship that troubled the older woman, and Miss Allison, *though* sometimes moved to secret jealousy, yet found it impossible to be actively jealous of Joanna. She was a loveable creature, so spontaneous and without sex-guile, and becoming so attached to Elizabeth that the complex of emotions had somehow to be accepted, ~~and stabilised~~. Miss Allison knelt in the chapel, and prayed that she might transcend those feline impulses that move the good as well as the bad.

"Keep me from mean thoughts and from mean motives."

Maternity, a substitution feeling, or something of the sort, seemed to be her choice. She found herself growing fond of the girl, and in such a fondness salvation might be assured. She could say to herself *A* "My dear Elizabeth, don't be silly. You had your chance in life and it turned out to be a rotten apple. You cannot be an Eve twice over, *by* not at your age. Oh, *w* that passion to possess! You do not possess that which you clutch at and snarl over. The

affection of a man and a girl and a dog. Life has been healed for you in this house. "What need is there for the raw sores of sex? Besides, my dear Elizabeth, you may be imagining things which may never happen, and if they should happen - let them find you their mother not their jealous, scolding prude."

Moreover, ~~Madred~~ Magnal's enthusiasms were so vigorous that they swept Miss Allison into their current.

"Come up and look at the latest marvel, Elizabeth. Let's take a picnic tea up to the hut."

And there they were on the slopes of Greenbury, the three of them together, with Bob the dog. Miss Allison had been careful to close all the lower windows at Lammas, lock the back door, and put the front door key in her pocket. She persisted in possessing a pocket. Nor was it thermos-tea, but the real beverage, for Elizabeth had packed a spirit-stove and kettle and two clean bottles full of water. She spread a white cloth and her cups and saucers, her buttered scones and cakes, and was secretly proud of her nice orderliness and forethought.

"By Jove, cheese-cakes!" said Magnal.

has made of catering - what shall we call it - a fine art. There is a conscience - even in cakes."

"And something more," said Joanna, a little pertly.

"Mysteries that are beyond the ken of man, eh? A Clean hands and a kind heart. 4 You have very pleasant hands, Elizabeth. In some ways I'm a fastidious beast. There are people who - if they touched my food - I should throw it to the pigs."

Miss Allison was bending over to listen to the kettle. Was it singing yet? Bob, tongue hanging out, lay watching them all. Joanna had glanced at both faces, and for the moment she was profoundly and secretly silent. Then she snuggled across to Miss Allison, and put an arm round her. 4 Had My Lord been a little too pompous and patronising?

"You are a dear, Aunt Bess."

Miss Allison gave a little inward shudder of exquisite pain and exquisite pleasure, emotions that may mingle in the secret places of the heart.

They sat, the three of them, Miss Allison in the centre, and as from a stage, gazed upon this piece of England, and

Pipe, and Joanna weaving a garland of flowers to hang round Bob's neck. Miss Allison could suppose that man always had been a cruel beast, full of lusts and greeds and the passion for power, yes, all save the unique few who had attained to wisdom and serenity. She glanced a little timidly at her Great Man who could understand that those who served him and laboured with him were friends, and at that moment Magnal began to speak.

"Just the same landscape. As old as the hills, and as peaceful. - These Romans knew where to build."

Joanna looked up from her garland.

"Couldn't we pretend to be Romans?"

"Ask Elizabeth. A Cooking over a wood fire, Elizabeth."

"But wasn't it always peaceful? I thought the Saxons - ."

"You mean the savages from central Europe, the swaggering, sword-rattling people. Ever heard of the Golden Age?"

Joanna had not.

"Was there one?"

"Well, the wise are beginning to agree that there was such an age. When they buried old Minos and Co. in the long

Joanna had finished her garland.

"Almost like it is now - for us?"

"Yes, for us, ♫ but we are exceptions."

He glanced at the silent pensive profile of Miss Allison.

"Women should make - peace. ♫ Some of them do."

Miss Allison smiled like a woman in her sleep.

"Come here, darling" said Joanna to Bob, "and have your pretty collar on."

Bob humoured her, and with resignation suffered the garland to be hung about his neck. It remained there just three minutes.

While they lingered and dreamed and chatted Magnal's excavations were waiting to be inspected, within the little timber and tile hut erected by Mr. Bull of Blenborough. Magnal knocked out his pipe on the heel of his shoe, and rose lazily. He had eaten three of Miss Allison's cheese-cakes. Now then, ladies and gentlemen and all dogs, let us inspect the labour of Modred Magnal Esq., Lord of Mistover and Baron of Greenbury. As yet Magnal had cleared the earth

of blue and white, yellow and black and red. In the central circle a young, black-haired, black-eyed Bacchus glared with sensual stolidity at the summer sky. A garland of yellow vine leaves adorned his head. A handsome fellow, but unpleasant, an ox-eyed sensualist. In the four corners the four Seasons were represented, grotesques that were somewhat sinister. A ^{red} blue and white border ornamented with a Greek fret joined the pavement to the crumbling plaster on the walls.

"Well, - what do you think of that, Elizabeth?"

He was so proud of its disinterment that she had to say that it was wonderful, which indeed - as an antique - it was. Bob, venturing upon the sacred pavement, was chided and called off, though Romano-British dogs must have walked there.

"One of the finest things of its kind in the island. I'd like to reconstruct the house over it."

"Was it a big house?"

"By the scale and richness of this - I should say so. What an adventure! Come and look at our hut."

of a multifiori bowl lay upon the table, and beside the piece of glass a coloured sketch which Joanna had made of it.

Miss Allison looked rather sadly at the sketch. Was the girl to be nearer to him than she was?

XVII.

The months passed and Magnal toiled mightily through a dry and sunny summer. The water dropped a foot in the Dewlap Dewpond, but the Mistbourne remained a brook, and the well held water. It was a long and laborious business filling a barrow and trundling it away to be riddled, and he had done no more than excavate two other rooms, a further portion of the great corridor and the vestibule. Measurements and their comparison with the ground plans of other Romano-British country houses led Magnal to suspect that this villa of his had been of very considerable size, almost as extensive as Ch^eidworth. Finds were numerous, so numerous that Magnal's imagination was challenged by them and by their possible significance, for if the place had been abandoned before the advance of the barbarians its owners might have been expected to have collected their treasures and their household gear and moved them westwards with them into safety. What had been the end of this great house? Had it lingered like some old man, or had its passing been sudden and violent? Many of these Roman homes had gone up in flames, but as yet Magnal had discovered no

the blanket of soil which he was removing he had found masses of roof tile imbedded in clay, with rusty iron nails, and here and there a nugget of black oak-knot. What was the significance of the clay? Had this house possessed an upper story of stud ~~and clay~~ and plaster? The conventional Romano-British country or farm house was a one story building of what is known as the corridor type, but if this mansion had possessed an upper floor, and there were no traces of fire, the assumption was that it had been abandoned in sudden fearful haste, and left to rot and crumble. To the blond savages it may have seemed an eerie, haunted house, given up to ghosts, strange and sinister, a place to be avoided. The number and the wealth of the finds he was recovering bore out this explanation. He suspected that the house had been abandoned in haste and fear when some marauding wolf-pack had come yelping up the Mistbourne valley.

Joanna had grown brown as a berry, and under the tan a soft colour war^med her skin. She looked like a young gipsy, and when at work she wore a yellow jumper, a short brown skirt, rough stockings, and gloves. Miss Allison

a slim, strong girl, standing five feet, six, and her young limbs and bosom had filled out. Maybe, this was strange work for a girl, but she had become absorbed in it, and in her colour-craft. She was becoming quite the expert with pencil and brush, and Magnal's museum displayed upon its walls the illustrations she had made. There were coins, pottery, glass, metal work of sorts, figurines, the head of Mercury, Samian and New Forest ware, a bronze mirror, unguent phials, toilet articles, brooches, pins. In one chamber a whole hoard of female ^{women's} trifles had been unearthed in one spot as though the chest or hutch that had held them had rotted where it stood. Joanna had spent hours in cleaning the objects, and in letting her fancy play upon them, these relics of some other woman who had died so long ago.

She was alone for hours with Modred Magnal in that solitary place, and their association had become so natural that neither of them had questioned it. They were father and daughter, brother and sister, master and maid, fellow workers, not conscious as yet of the need to analyse the

and to Joanna he was lord, master and friend. Neither of them had seen the sun rise or the sun set over ^{other} mysterious manifestations.

Neither of them noticed that Miss Allison had become even more silent, and that an air of gentle austerity had returned to her. She had grown young and she had grown old. The problem was hers whether she liked it or not, and was not to be solved by the wearing of a youthful hat. Miss Allison had reverted to a simple and matronly taste in dress, and when shopping in Blenborough she was just Miss Allison, Mr. Modred Magnal's staid and efficient cook-housekeeper. To her, ~~Modred~~ Magnal remained the great man, magnanimous, considerate, somewhat paternal, seemingly unvexed by the tricks of the flesh, but ~~Modred~~ Magnal was man. He might transcend the petty urges and meannesses of life, and feel himself absorbed in this labour which he seemed to love, but was he not man, and had not this comely and sensitive girl any other meaning for him? Joanna was more than a pretty wench. She was becoming educated, a person, and a rather fascinating young person who could ^{pose} praise a man's ^mloveliness in the spirit as well as in the flesh.

Wonder whether the solution would not reveal itself in the strength of this same affection. To Joanna she was Aunt Bess, and though the relegation of the woman in her to middle-age might have been an offence, Miss Allison could not cherish it as such, for common-sense and affection were against it. This girl was indeed a very loveable creature, and in being warmed by Joanna's friendship, she divined in it a reality that might more than recompense her for the fading of a sentimental dream. She could say - "Don't be a fool, Elizabeth Allison. What more could you be to him than you are?"

But she did consider the other side of the picture. Was Modred Magnal too old for a girl's love, if that love should come to fruition? Old! - A man like Magnal never grew old. He was too vital, too full of interests, too much the visionary. He was alive even in that Roman past; he would be alive in any possible future. - But supposing that Joanna loved and he did not, or in the way in which that vivid creature might ask to be loved? Was it fair to the girl? Would she ask for fairness? Such things might be

It was late in the autumn when Magnal made a discovery, a discovery that caused him to pause in his labours as on the edge of some sinister dark pool. He had been clearing the main corridor towards the west, past the winter room, where this passage-way might be expected to end. It did not end here. The red tesserae continued. Magnal had uncovered what appeared to be another doorway leading into a chamber beyond the winter room. He was pecking away carefully at the soil with his pick when a sudden crumbling of the earth revealed the bleached yet yellowish bones of a human hand.

Magnal stood and stared at it. Those four bony phalanges stuck out of the soil like the veritable claws of death, and even though they might be a thousand or so years old their grimness gave Magnal a queasy feeling in his stomach. Had he indeed stumbled upon an ancient tragedy? The points of those bony fingers were level with the floor, so the hand to which they had belonged had been spread upon the floor before the roof had collapsed and the walls had crumbled. Magnal squatted down and with his own live fingers began to scrape more soil away. The bony hand appeared to

weapon severed them or left them hanging by a shred of skin and flesh? Had that dead hand held a weapon, or had it been raised to ward off some blow? He scraped more soil away, and found the bones of the wrist and forearm, and then he came upon an object glued and crusted with red-black rust, the pointed blade of a sword.

That settled it. Magnal stood up and turned his head to look at Joanna who was sitting on a camp stool further down the corridor, cleaning a fragment of glass. Absorbed in her work, she had not noticed anything peculiar in his movements. On a dozen such occasions he had grubbed gently with his fingers to retrieve some fragile object from its bed of soil.

Magnal bent down and drew some earth over that tragic hand. If he had come upon a kind of butcher's corner, it was not a discovery that he wished to reveal to the eyes of Joanna Foster.

He straightened, stretched himself and faced about.

"Joanna."

She raised her head and smiled, and he thought how live she looked in this dead and tragic place.

He joined her and stood looking down over her shoulder.

"Opalescent with age. ~~W~~ I don't mean you, but the glass!"

She laughed.

"I think I can copy that."

"Can you? ~~W~~ Splendid! ~~W~~ Our monumental work will be a veritable text-book. ~~W~~ The one thing I want to find is the well."

"Why - the well?"

"Because our Romano-British friends, ~~W~~ when they had to leave in a hurry, had a way of throwing their valuables down the well."

"In the hope - ?"

"Yes, go up top, Joanna. In the hope of a happier return. I rather think I shall work down this way now, and out beyond the vestibule. There was sure to be a courtyard, and it may have had a cryptoporticus."

"What was that?"

"A kind of loggia or arcade."

He glanced at his wrist-watch.

"Say, my dear. ~~W~~ time to pack up and trek for tea."

"Well, ♫ I love it all."

They put the tools away and locked up the hut, and took the sloping way down into the valley. The beeches of Witch's Wood burned below them, and a faint mist was beginning to rise in the hollows. Joanna paused to look down at those flaming trees, and in her eyes was a dreaming tenderness.

"What did you think when you heard me singing there?"

She was very close to him, and he looked at her perfect profile.

"I thought I had caught a pixie."

"I must have looked a funny little scarecrow."

"No, ♫ I did not see you quite like that, even though your mouth had been rather full of blackberries."

Magnal was no ringer of bells, and when the parlour bell did ring Miss Allison knew that there was a reason for it. She and Joanna had just finished supper in a kitchen that had become a pleasant and comfortable sitting-room and Miss Allison rose from her chair to answer the bell.

"Shall I go, Aunt Bess?"

"No, my dear, I'll go. ♫ It means that there is a

Miss Allison smiled at her. Was washing-up play, and the cleaning and drawing of the archeological material - work?

Magnal had his feet up in front of the fire. He laid his book aside, and refilled a pipe.

"Shut the door, Elizabeth. Advice needed."

Miss Allison sat down. Was she to listen to the first murmurings of some romantic confession?

"I made a rather interesting and grisly find today up there. The beginnings of a skeleton. Maybe - there are more of them. I did not let Joanna see it."

Miss Allison sat in silence.

"The thing bears out what I rather suspected. Our Roman villa was a tragic house. The savages may have made a complete slaughter there."

"How horrible!"

"Yes, even though it happened so long ago. - Now, it is not the kind of investigation one would thrust upon a sensitive girl."

"Must you go on with it?"

"I'm afraid I must, Elizabeth. Not mere idle

"No, I can't say I can - for the moment."

"Not even a nice white lie?"

"What kind of excuse, sir?"

"Well, look here, can't we pretend that you are a little below par, and that you need more help in the house? - And I might spin a yarn about winter and the weather. Too much dirt about even for a girl, even in gumboots."

"I might."

"Or shall I do - the embroidering? ~~My conscience is less greasy than yours, Elizabeth.~~ If I do it, will you play up?"

Miss Allison hesitated for a moment, while snubbing the selfish thought that Magnal and the girl would be less alone together.

"Yes, - if you like to try, sir."

"Then I will. Tell Joanna I should like to speak to her."

Lammas was not a fussily self-conscious house. It did not ask itself how this subtle ballance between parlour and kitchen was maintained, with Man in the Parlour, and Minerva and Venus in the kitchen.

sit down to table together? Lammas had always been a man's house, and the tradition continued, nor had it occurred to Miss Allison that she was ~~Modred~~ Magnal's social equal. Society - as such - did not exist in this separative world. Magnal was the supreme bachelor permitted to sprawl as he pleased, sheltered from small-talk and the privileges of the petticoat, free to sit in his shirt-sleeves and his socks, if that was his pleasure.

Joanna came in and stood just inside the door. Young things in these enlightened days are not very reverent to their elders. Many of Joanna's sisters might have referred to him in private as the Old Man, but Joanna was otherwise. She had put Modred Magnal upon a pedestal, and strange to say he had remained there.

"Oh, ♡ Joanna ♡. Come and sit down by the fire. ♡ I have discovered that I have been rather selfish."

The Joanna of the Lammas parlour and the Joanna of Greenbury were delicately different. Joanna appeared to cherish her young dignity in this room, not because she was

like the study of the Head to some shy boy. The room was Modred Magnal, and as such full of emotional implications, vaguely divined, but as actual as the scent of incense in a church.

Joanna sat erect, attentive, knees together, hands clasped, an attitude which her grandmother would have praised. A sleek sedateness warmed itself before the fire while the great man spoke.

"I'm afraid we have been leaving rather too much to Miss Allison. - No, no complaints. ♣ But it struck me that she was looking a little tired."

Joanna's dark eyes were on him. ♣ Had she too been selfish, if that absorbing business up at Greenbury could be described as selfish?

"I put it to her, Joanna, that she has been finding the work rather heavy. ♣ Well, I'm afraid she has. ♣ So you see - ."

"I'm so sorry."

"I knew you would be. ♣ So, I must surrender my co-explorer and draughtswoman for a time. ♣ Besides, with the winter coming on, puddling about in the dirt isn't quite

What went on behind the lovely and enigmatic mask of youth?
Did anything go on?

"I quite understand, " sir."

Now, why should ~~Modred~~ Magnal vaguely resent the "Sir",
but resent it he did, only to find himself questioning the
reason thereof. Was he growing sensitive about his age?
Why, damn it he was only forty nine, and as fit as a man of
thirty! Yet, he caught himself wondering whether it was not
the particular person who mattered. " This child " .
But was she a child? He sat up, leaned forward and poked
the fire.

"Thanks, Joanna. - No reason why you shouldn't go on
with the illustrating, while I dig and write."

He was aware of her turning her head towards his desk
where the manuscript of the monumental work lay open. What
a perfect profile the child had, and how easy and graceful
were all her movements!

"I could do that in the evening."

Magnal had waited almost truculently for the Sir, but
this time it did not arrive.

How are you off for paints and pencils, and all that?"

"I'm getting rather short of water colour."

"Well, next time we are in Blenborough we must see about it. Some day we shall have to fit you up a studio, Joanna."

She smiled and was silent, and her silence puzzled him.

This child of Witch's Wood seemed very aloof from him tonight, nor could he think of anything further to say to her. It almost appeared that they had become shy of each other, and too mutually self-conscious.

Joanna rose.

"I'll go and help Miss Allison, if you don't mind, sir."

Magnal's big black head rose in the air. * Damn it, that Sir again! Was it that he did not want to be sir to her?

"All right, Joanna. * Thank you for seeing - our - point of view."

Almost surreptitiously he watched her leave the room, and when she had gone it felt strangely empty.

XVIII.

It was a labour of Hercules clearing the western end of the corridor, for the autumn rains had set in and the soil was adhesive and heavy, but Magnal tackled the job alone. He had recovered the whole of that first skeleton; it was that of a man, and the skull showed a gash where sword or axe had split ^{it} ~~the bones~~. It appeared to Magnal that this man had died in a desperate defence of the room beyond the summer chamber, the last dark corner into which the trapped household had retreated. Magnal collected all the poor bones and nailed them up in a rough wooden case. He had found a skeleton, and a skeleton could not be unearthed in a civilised community without the official world taking cognizance of the event, and Magnal had no intention of courting official interference. He made no report upon the matter. The dead man's sword, and a gold brooch, a ring, two buckles and the nails of his shoes, Magnal concealed in a box in the storage hut, together with the improvised coffin.

It rained and it rained, but Magnal stuck to the job. He wanted to clear this "Death's Corner" before any ^{na} carnal

a heap to be dealt with later. But some of the joy seemed to have gone out of the job. It had become a clammy, sticky, sinister business. Was it the foul weather, or was he missing somebody? Joanna? He found himself only too ready to chuck his tools into the shed when the dusk descended on the hills, to lock the door and pocket the key and tramp back to Lammas, a hot bath, a fire, good food and two human and live faces, to say nothing of the dog.

Miss Allison was house-proud, and on one rare occasion she showed temper over an interchange of mud between Magnal's boots and the kitchen floor. Man is so apt to stride thoughtlessly over woman's nice sense of order.

"Would - you - mind taking off your boots, sir, before - ?"

Miss Allison peevish! Well, and perhaps with justification.

"Sorry, Elizabeth. * Man is a dirty beast. * I apologise."

So, in the future Magnal removed his foul footgear in the porch, and slippers were ready for him, but Miss Allison's outburst over mud was to produce for her other

steal over Joanna's face. The dog's quick ears would give the warning, and Joanna would jump up, collect the slippers and meet Magnal at the porch door. Bob was there to keep her in countenance, but Joanna's obvious waylaying of the master brought a frown to Miss Allison's forehead.

"Wow, wow, wow," said Bob.

"Hullo, Joanna!"

She would just look at him with those black and glimmering eyes of hers, and hold out the slippers.

"Mud, my dear, much mud. And thank you."

She would stand while he kicked off his boots, a soft and mysterious presence that was like the warmth and the glow of the house.

"Have you anything for me?"

So often he had not, and she would look disappointed.

"Afraid not, Joanna. No use trying to sieve sludge."

Then came the evening when she put out a hand to take his dirty boots from him, and Magnal seemed to become aware of the contrast between muddy boots and her exquisite little face.

Miss Allison, rating herself for it, had looked through the crack of the kitchen door and seen that kiss. It had sent a strange shudder through her. "So, the girl had been playing up for that kiss! But what a vulgar assumption, and what a loathsome thing was jealousy! You might think you had chased it out of the house, and lo - it was back again rubbing round your legs like a mangy and fawning cat.

Magnal had come through with his boots, to deposit them in the scullery, and had found Miss Allison taking a steaming kettle from the stove, and keeping her back turned to him. It had not occurred to Magnal that she might have seen that kiss.

"Is it a buttered toast day, Elizabeth?"

Miss Allison, facing about to fill the teapot, had kept her eyes lowered.

"I'm afraid not. "Would you - ?"

"I think I see scones?"

"Yes, sir."

Buttered toast and a kiss and a girl flying upstairs as though to be exultantly alone with the thrill upon her lips. Had she not studied every whim of his, trailed a cloak of

emotions nicely put away in lavender. She was jealous of Joanna, even though she could swear that she loved Joanna. Did a woman ever know how her heart would harry her?

Magnal had gone in to his tea, and Miss Allison had sat down to hers, and looked at Joanna's empty chair. ♣ Was there to be an intrigue in the house? ♣ "Oh, you beast, Elizabeth." For, did she not know that if the thing had happened to her, she would have clasped it and not called it an intrigue? Footsteps had come down the stairs. Joanna had looked a little flushed, and her eyes were bright, and her thoughts were so much elsewhere. The meal had begun in silence.

Said Miss Allison, ♣ "Joanna, my dear, I should not fuss Mr. Magnal."

Joanna's eyes had lifted with a startled stare to Miss Allison's face.

"Oh, ♣ Aunt Bess!"

"Men don't like it."

There had been silence. A mutual discomfort had possessed them both, and a vague sense of unhappy antagonism

Space

256.

Late in November Magnal unearthed his second skeleton, that of a man who had been slain in the blind end of the corridor, fighting with his back to the wall, and between his ribs was the rusted head of the spear that had killed him. Magnal packed the poor bones away in another case, and told himself that one day he must lay these relics to rest with some sort of ritual to honour them, for these dead had died fighting. Then, he began to clear the earth from the small chamber beyond the summer room. He was in doubt as to its nature, and he opened a trench along the right hand wall. The pavement was of mosaic, red and white tesserae, and of a quality indicating that the room had been of some importance. He found flue tiles in the walls, and the work had not gone far when he came upon the feet and ankle bones of yet another skeleton. Magnal left the bones there, deciding to carry his trench right round the room, but he had gone less than another yard when he struck a stone object. It appeared to jut out into the room, and as he worked round it he found a recess in the wall, in the shape of a tiny apse. He began to clear this recess, and then he came upon a head, not a human head but one of stone, belonging to a bust or

object was the altar, and the recess had held the images of the household god or gods. These dead people had been pagans.

His first effort was to recover the statue. He found it to be a female bust, the head draped and encircled by a garland of vine leaves and wheat ears. The head of the Mother Goddess, ♀ Fecundity, Maternity? ♀ As a piece of sculpture it was less obvious and conventional than the majority of such specimens. The head might have been the head of the Virgin Mary.

The tragic picture of all that had happened here was taking shape. These people, surprised perhaps by the blind^o savages, had made an attempt to defend the house, and when the Saxons had broken in, the defenders had retreated along the corridor and to this last and sacred room. ♀ Had there been women and children here? Magnal stood and reflected. Should he go on with the work or leave the dead in peace? ♀ Well, there had been no peace in the manner of their dying, and he decided to clear the little chamber, but to leave everything he found in situ, if that was possible. The erudite differed in their rendering of the story of the Saxon invasion. Some historians asserted that there had

might have some considerable bearing on the issue. It suggested that these Saxons had been a butcherly crowd, like their modern representatives - the Germans.

So, Magnal set to work, carrying his trench right round the wall, and leaving the central oblong of earth to the last. Somehow he had a feeling that the ultimate tragedy would reveal itself in that cube of soil, and it was so, for when he dug into it he found this little chamber to be a veritable mausoleum. The Saxons had butchered the whole household here, and flung the bodies into a heap, and that was how Magnal found them, a disorder of interlocked bones. There had been children here, and a dog. Those men had died, fighting to the last to defend their women and children.

"Beasts!" said Magnal, and thought how strange his anger was over a butcherly business that had happened so long ago.

It was three days before Christmas when Magnal completed the uncovering of this Romano-British tragedy. The weather was clear and cold, with Greenbury and Dead Man's Down serene and solitary above the winter beeches of Witch's Wood. How right those names sounded as he stood and looked down upon that red and white pavement with its grinning skulls.

spread a tarpaulin over the dead, and the problem of the moment was what to do with the ~~head~~. Should he replace the soil and leave them as he had found them, or should he re-bury these ancient bones in some peaceful place, and set the head of their Sacred Mother over them? The sun was sinking over Dead Man's Down, and the light slanted across the landscape. It rested upon the green flanks of the Mistover Long Barrow, and the inspiration came to him. Why not lay these bones to rest in the burial chamber down yonder?

He had stepped down into the corridor, and was about to unfold the tarpaulin, when he heard a little sound behind him, like a sudden catching of the breath, and turning he saw - Joanna. She was standing there above him, wide eyed and rigid.

"Joanna w!"

His lips moved, but no sound came from them, and with a sudden realisation of how this sinister picture could shock the girl he jerked the black sheet across the floor and spread it over the dead.

"You shouldn't have seen this, my dear."

She was shaking. Her eyes looked black in her frightened face; for the human skull can produce a kind of primaeval

not one skull here, but seven.

"Oh, - how horrible ♣ !" said her black eyes and her mute mouth.

She looked such a little thing shivering up above there on this winter day that Magnal was moved by a sudden, protective tenderness. He climbed out of the trench and put his arm round her, and felt her young body press itself against his.

"I had not meant you to know of this, ♣ Joanna."

"Is that why - ?"

"I'm afraid so. ♣ We told you a white lie. ♣ But what made you - ?"

Her head was resting against his shoulder.

"Oh, - I felt I wanted ♣ . I hadn't been here for so long. What did all that mean?"

"It all happened very long ago. ♣ I had begun to suspect some sort of tragedy. ♣ You see, we found so many things which seemed to suggest - a sudden end to the life here."

And then she said a strange thing.

"It might have happened to - us, if we had been living

raise her head.

"Look over and beyond, my dear. ♣ Look at the hills and the valleys. They are alive and at peace. ♣ They are just as they must have seen them before this happened. ♣ Life goes on."

She turned her face to his. The eyes were half closed, the lips dreamy and tender.

"I feel so - safe - with you."

And then he kissed her, and she returned his kiss, and in that moment the truth was revealed to him. He was man.

Had ~~Modred~~ Magnal the philosopher observed and studied with dispassionate interest ~~Modred~~ Magnal the man he might have discovered something ridiculous in the sudden and absurd shyness that took possession of this large creature. It may be said that your man of five and forty does not fall in love as does your boy of twenty, and that your middle-aged fool may be less confident than your young one, always granted that love is folly. However, Modred Magnal found himself walking down the green slope of Greenbury, holding the girl's hand, feeling almost like some selfish

behind his great black head, while this slip of a girl drifted beside him, holding his hand, and causing him strange embarrassment.

He did not know what to say to her, while she, confidently holding his hand, appeared to be untroubled by his silence.

"Feeling better now, Joanna?"

She spoke to the landscape and not to him, and he, glancing down at her, saw her eyes a'shine.

"Yes. ♪ Shouldn't we put them to rest again?"

"Where would you put them, Joanna?"

"Why not in the chapel graveyard?"

"They were pagans, my dear. Not that that matters."

"Not Christians?"

"No. ♪ I had thought of the Long Barrow. They could all be together with friend Minos in the burial chamber."

She appeared to consider the suggestion, but the little secret smile on her face had a mystery of its own.

"Yes, ♪ that would be better. ♪ Or - you could bury them up yonder."

smoking in the thick of its crown of thorns. The sun was below the horizon, and there was a smell of frost in the air. The lights went up in the parlour as they passed through the garden gate, and Miss Allison, coming to draw the curtains, saw Magnal and Joanna walking up the pathway hand in hand. Miss Allison stood very still, as though some emotional spasm had shocked her into immobility; then, with a quick jerk of the hand she drew the curtains along the rods.

Bob went rushing to the porch door, and his barking appeared to irritate Elizabeth Allison. She put a hand to her forehead.

"Be quiet, dog, be quiet."

Bob paid no attention to her, and Miss Allison walked quickly down the passage and into the kitchen, for she shrank from meeting those two. Almost she hated them. Her poor jealousy was pestering her with questions. Where had they met? Had they arranged to meet? Was there a love-affair going on behind her back? And if there were what business was it of hers? You fool, Elizabeth! She felt the agonising need of setting herself some task. She put

She had heard the porch door close, and the girls' footsteps going quickly towards the stairs like the quick beating of an exultant heart. Magnal and the dog had turned into the parlour, and by the sound they were making, master and dog were romping together. "Three happy creatures, while she - ! Steadily and with a kind of applied bitterness she spread butter and sliced, spread butter and sliced. You fool, Elizabeth, oh - you fool!

She could hear Joanna's footsteps on the floor above. Yes, they were just like poignant heart-beats. "Why had the girl ever come into this house? A door banged. Joanna was coming down the stairs; she was in the kitchen. Miss Allison cut bread and butter; she did not look up.

"Oh, "Aunt Bess, "I'm late. "Let me do that."

Miss Allison was conscious of an intense grip upon her self.

"Thank you, Joanna, "I think I have finished. "Been for a walk?"

"Yes, "I felt I had to go up to Greenbury."

"Oh, "yes, Greenbury."

And suddenly the light went out of Joanna's eyes. Her face seemed to grow thin and white.

With me?"

Miss Allison was lifting the last slice on to the dish.

"I am not angry with you, my dear."

Her anger had turned against herself.

XIX.

So far as the dead was concerned, Magnal was persuaded to change his plans, for official interference was eluded by one minute, and Miss Allison, when consulted, had a very natural protest to register. A police constable from Melfont St. Giles, nosing about the country on his bike, and sighting that hut upon the flank of Greenbury, decided to satisfy a very natural curiosity. Moreover, any man who advertises originality in his mode of living or in his craft is regarded with hostility and suspicion by the unoriginal. As it happened Magnal was on the site when the constable came pushing his bike up the broad grass ramp to Roman House, for that is what Joanna had christened it. To keep the tarpaulin in place Magnal had weighted its edges with a number of large flints, and as luck would have it the cover was in situ.

Now, it should be the policy of the wise to be polite to officials, and courteously to circumvent them. Conventional stupidity can be a stubborn and butting goat, and the wise will elude the boney cranium, and side-step when the beast attacks. Magnal, catching sight of the figure in blue, strolled down to intercept.

"What's going on up here?"

Magnal was moved to throw his head back and laugh, but the young man's arrogance provoked him to mischief.

"Interested in archaeology, officer?"

The constable stared.

"What's that?"

"There's a funny story about archaeologists. It is said that in the Great War the last group for demobilization contained three categories, clowns, bath-chairmen, and archaeologists. So, you see, we are very harmless people."

The young man looked sulky. Was this black bearded blighter pulling legs? Magnal smiled upon him, and swept a hand towards his excavations.

"Interested in Roman remains? Yes, this was a Roman house. Put your bike against the shed, and come and look."

So, Magnal proceeded to give his visitor a lecture upon Romano-British architecture, and also to demonstrate it. He became absorbed in his subject, and the young constable became absorbed in boredom. There were two tarpaulins, one covering the winter room, the other the lararium, and Magnal stepped down and proceeded to roll back the first tarpaulin.

The young man stared ox-eyed at the Wine God. He had heard of Bacchus. Somewhere a gentleman of that name ran a brewery.

"What's under the other?"

"Oh, just another pavement. Not fully uncovered yet. This is the real show-piece. You see, in those days they had a special winter room in this wet island. Under it was the hypocaust. You will notice in the walls the flue tiles."

The young man began to fidget. He pulled out a watch.

"If you'll excuse me, sir, I'm afraid - I've - ."

"Ah, professional calls. What a pity! I should like to have shown you - . Well, another day."

The law ^{and} reclined its bike and departed.

Magnal had been born under the sign of Gemini, and if he preferred to play by himself, he could play his game in all seriousness, and yet see mischief in the funeral of a mouse. To transfer the poor dead to the Long Barrow might prove too public a ceremony, and though his car might serve as a hearse, when he proposed it to Miss Allison she was ready with a mild protest. The car was used for

Magnal accepted her suggestion. There happened to be a disused chalk-pit on the lower flank of Greenbury, and it was smothered in brambles and thorns. So, Magnal, having sorted out the poor bones, packed them into sacks, and humped them down to the chalk-pit. One skull he did retain, that of the warrior who had been cut down while fighting to defend the doorway of the lararium. With pick and shovel he excavated a communal grave in the floor of the chalk-pit close to its white wall, and laid the dead relics in it, not forgetting the skeleton of the dog. An hour before sunset on a January day he, Elizabeth Allison and Joanna stood beside the grave, and Magnal read the burial service over those Roman bones. He remained behind to fill in the soil, and next day to make concealment doubly sure he took a crowbar up to the edge of the quarry and sent a ton or two of chalk cascading down upon the grave. Any curious person could conclude that rain and frost had been at work to cause a minor landslip in the chalkpit.

Winter was upon them now and in earnest. Magnal had

all work was at a standstill, and with the snow six inches deep and promising to lie Magnal was reminded of his days in Switzerland and the Tyrol. The rough trackway was unfit for the old car, but Magnal footed it into Melfont St. Giles, caught a bus to Blenborough and a train to town, and returned that evening with two pairs of skis.

The funny little junipers in their snow coats on Deadman's Down stood and watched Joanna's first lesson in skiing. Miss Allison had seen them go off together, accompanied by Bob, and Miss Allison's face was pinched and thin. Were they going to be together for hours alone in the snow? But Bob enjoyed the business. When Joanna took one of her tumbles, which were many, Bob rushed up and licked her face. He laughed, and Magnal laughed, but Joanna was not so happy with her young dignity all a'sprawl.

"I'm afraid I'm awfully stupid."

Magnal would pick her up, and resume his tuition. With a clear blue sky, and the world all white he felt like a big boy at play with a girl. Why be too serious about the business? He had a feeling that Joanna was as virgin as the

imagined innocence? Let this delightful fun be of today, without troubling about tomorrow. Sometimes she clung to him and laughed, and her little clinging hands were happy. She grew flushed and breathless and her eyes were bright, and Bob barked and scampered beside them. Neither of them saw a solitary figure pass along the lower slopes of Greenbury and disappear into Witch's Wood. They glided down to within fifty yards of where Elizabeth Allison was standing half hidden by a beech bole, and there Joanna did one of her tumbles, and Magnal picked her up. She clung to him, and Elizabeth Allison was shocked. It seemed to her that this intimacy could have only one ending.

What could she do about it? What right had she to do anything about it? Assuredly and rightly so Modred Magnal might regard the candour of interference as an insult. Had not some cynic defined the difference between rape and seduction as a matter of technique, and Elizabeth Allison had no justification for assuming either. After all Joanna could not be blamed if she fell in love with Modred Magnal. The romance might be mutual and end in marriage.

woman that she was, why could she not accept that which might be inevitable? And could she bear it if it were to happen? Why should she not bear it, and live on as the devoted friend of two people who could still think of her as Aunt Bess? Would such a complex and delicate relationship be possible?

Elizabeth Allison did not enter Lammas, but passed on to the cold, dim chapel, and knelt before the altar. The dark little sanctuary made her shiver. She tried to pray, but thoughts and emotions were confused and in a tangle.

"Oh, God, keep me from being mean and petty."

But the horrid reality confronted her. If these two married she would have to go, and she had nowhere to go to. They would not want her, a kind of maiden-aunt permanently established in the kitchen. This ohit of a girl would be the Lady of Lammas, and she - who had worked to create this lovely and peaceful place - no more than a sort of super-servant who could be discharged, the victim of a young wife's whimsies. Middle-aged men could be so silly about young women, infatuated, breathlessly chasing a second youth.

It was growing dark, but Elizabeth Allison's knees seemed to be glued to the stone. She could not bring herself to go back and face those two, lovers who were so boy and girlishly in love that they did not appear to realise that they were in that condition. The cold of the stones seemed to travel up her legs to her body, and to chill her heart. She shivered. ♡ She felt that she was not wanted. Even Bob the dog preferred to go scampering after Joanna.

Magnal, carrying both pairs of skis, waited for Joanna to open the porch door.

"Tea, by Jove, and buttered toast."

Joanna, a little flushed, her hair very black under a jade green woollen cap, knocked the snow from her boots.

"Shall I ask Aunt Bess?"

"Go to it, my dear. ♡ I'll carry these round to the barn. How do the ankles feel today?"

"Oh, not quite so achy."

"We shall have to put Bob on skis."

Joanna passed down towards the kitchen, calling as she

was singing on the stove, and the tea things ready on the table. There was a dimness here, and Joanna switched on the lights. She went to the foot of the stairs and called.

"Aunt Bess, we're back. Can I make buttered toast?"

Again - silence, and Joanna was puzzled. Had Miss Allison gone to Melfont St. Giles or Bareacres Farm for milk or butter? Joanna ran up the stairs.

"Aunt Bess!"

No voice answered her. She knocked at Miss Allison's door, and receiving no answer, she opened the door and looked in. The room was in half darkness and empty.

Joanna ran down the stairs just as Magnal came in by the yard door.

"Aunt Bess isn't here."

"Not in? But she - ."

"She can't have gone to Melfont in all this snow. I wonder where she is?"

Magnal was unwinding his muffler.

"Wait a moment. That's easily settled. Footsteps in the snow."

the snow going up the trackway towards the chapel, and Joanna's quick eyes saw that single chain going but not returning. So, Aunt Bess was in the chapel, and perhaps she had forgotten the time, though twilight was falling. Joanna ran to the chapel. She was so full of the glow of her own happiness that she did not divine any strangeness in Elizabeth Allison's absence. To youth in full flower a faded woman vaguely in the forties is not comprehended as a possible competitor in romance.

The chapel door was open and Joanna looked in. The place was almost in darkness, but the girl could distinguish the figure kneeling before the altar. Joanna's footsteps had been muffled by the snow, and Miss Allison had not heard her.

"Aunt Bess."

Joanna's voice was little more than a whisper, but it caused Miss Allison to stiffen on her knees.

"Aunt Bess, it's tea time. " We wondered where you were."

We! Miss Allison rose and her knees felt glued with

narrow window in the gable, and saw it as a mere slit in the bitter gloom.

"I shall be ~~A~~ back ~~in~~ in a few minutes, Joanna. ~~4~~ You can - "

"He - wants buttered toast."

Buttered toast! ~~A~~ Miss Allison was shivering.

"Then - make it, ~~4~~ my dear. ~~4~~ I - will lock up the chapel."

Joanna returned to Lamma. There had been nothing strange to her in Miss Allison's aloneness in the chapel. Magnal, standing at the window after making up the parlour fire, saw her come up the path, a pretty creature, alive and colourful and happy. Was he in love with this child? Well, why worry about a rose or lust to pluck it when the flower was still in bud? He went out into the passage to meet her.

"Any luck, Joanna?"

"Yes, I found her in the chapel. - I'll go and make the toast."

Nor did ~~Mered~~ Magnal see any particular significance

had found her God. Magnal strolled along the passage to join in the making of buttered toast, and when Miss Allison slipped silently in by the yard door she found Joanna using the toasting-fork, with Magnal anointing with butter the slices that she passed to him.

"Hullo, Elizabeth. We wondered where you were."

Miss Allison glided away towards the passage and the stairs. So, they had wondered what had become of her, but her absence could not have been a source of trouble to either of them. She mounted the stairs, sat down on her bed, and after a while removed her damp shoes. It was cold in her room, but it cost her an effort to go downstairs into the light and the warmth where youth seemed in possession.

Magnal was an early riser. He would call the early hours the cream of the morning, and even these dark winter dawns had for him meaning and mystery. As man, to the exclusion of the undesired presence of some casual male, he made himself responsible for the man-things, the cutting of wood, the carrying in of coal, the stoking of the furnace, and he found a simple pleasure in these things, appetite

Magnal, shouldering in a great basket of wood, could never remember a morning when he did not find that austere figure kneeling with gloved hands to make and light the kitchen fire.

But this January morning she was not here, and the farmhouse kitchen had a strange and unfamiliar emptiness. The clock ticked solemnly, but there was no other sound in the house. Bob was out and about on his morning's business, and Magnal set his basket down, and supposed that Elizabeth had overslept herself.

Well, why not light the fire for her? She had done it often enough for him, and that was how Joanna found him when she came downstairs with sleep still in her eyes.

"Hallo, Joanna, better go and give Elizabeth a knock."

"Isn't she down?"

"No."

"She must have overslept."

Joanna went lightly back up the stairs and knocked at Miss Allison's door.

"Aunt Bess, it's a quarter past seven."

For a moment there was silence and then a very little

Joanna opened the door, to find the room in darkness. She switched on the light, and saw a haggard face, a face whose eyes blinked at her. Miss Allison had the clothes drawn up to her chin. She looked strangely old and faded.

"Oh, - I'm so sorry. 4 I'll get some aspirin."

"Please turn off the light. 7 It hurts."

Joanna switched off the light, and felt her way to the window to draw the curtains.

"I'm so sorry. 6 Some hot tea, Aunt Bess?"

The strange dead voice answered her.

"Tell Mr. Magnal I'm afraid I am going to be ill."

XX.

Lammas Farm did possess a clinical thermometer, and when Joanna, at Magnal's instigation, took Miss Allison's temperature and found it to be 103.7, Magnal put the chains on the wheels of his car and drove to Melfont St. Giles for the doctor. His name was Benn, Dr. Roger Temperley Benn, and his surname fitted him more aptly than did his Christian ones, for he was short and round, and wore spectacles and had kind, wise eyes under ferocious and bristling eyebrows. Magnal caught the doctor in his surgery, and when he had introduced himself, Dr. Benn looked at him with veiled curiosity. So, this was the rich and eccentric defrocked physician who dug up the relics of the ancient world, and who, according to Melfont St. Giles' scandalous tongue, kept two mares, or - rather a mare and a filly to satisfy his varying sexual moods. Dr. Benn had no illusions about the morals of Melfont St. Giles, but as a healer he had remained gently cynical yet beneficent.

"I shall be very grateful to you, doctor, if you can come over early and see my housekeeper. She's in bed with a

"Not at all. A doctor's car is precious."

"In January, sir, rather seriously so."

Now, Magnal and Dr. Benn took a liking to each other as men will, when courtesy and consideration count in this rather selfish world, and humbug and hysteria are thorns in the flesh. The doctor's surgery had the smell of such old-fashioned country sanctums, spirituous and fragrant, professional lavender, the perfume of Dr. Benn's Victorian predecessors. He turned out the gas-jet, said a few words to his secretary-dispenser, put on a vast overcoat and gloves, collected a bag, and smiled at Modred Magnal.

"I'm ready, sir."

Dr. Benn knew this downland country from Stoneton to Camden Tracey, and he too was interested in downland man and his successors, and Magnal found himself talking to the little doctor of the Long Barrow and the Roman Villa on Greenbury. Would Dr. Benn care to see it? He would, very much so, when influenza and chest complaints were less urgent. So, they came to the snow covered mountain of thorns, and Dr. Benn

Dr. Benn looked coy.

"Do I? [^] But why?"

"Well, ^{the} physician - you know, [^] ^S "

"Sometimes have to pretend. [^] There are human nastinesses that no medicine can purge."

Magnal stopped the car at the garden gate, and Dr. Benn, emerging with his bag, looked with critical and appreciative eyes at the reconditioned Lammas. Mr. Modred Magnal might be eccentric, and under a cloud, but he was a gentleman of supreme taste, and with a feeling for England that had been England, mellow brick and gracious stone, ^{Scrum} ~~pickered~~ roofs, and silvery oak. How lovely and comforting was that spacious roof.

"Lammas redivivus, sir."

"Do you remember it - as it used to be?"

"Just. [^] I looked after old Mannerton in his last illness, [^] when the place was dying under his feet. [^] I was very young then, and I thought I knew everything."

"Ah. - the ultimate wisdom of wise ignorance."

liked a looker, for he had so many ugly old woman² to humour. Beards! How Nature did take her revenge upon the hairy-minded!

It was Joanna who led him up the stairs to Miss Allison's room, and stood beside the bed while he questioned and examined his patient. Joanna's young eyes were soft and compassionate, for Miss Allison's secret bitterness was unrevealed to her, but Joanna's presence appeared to irritate Miss Allison, and sick woman that she was, she yet could cherish her privacy.

"You needn't stay, my dear. ~~Much to do.~~"

Her voice had become breathless, a poignant whisper, and Joanna slipped away and down the stairs. Just why did Aunt Bess not want her in the room? Had she intimate things to tell the doctor and was shy of confessing before a young girl? But as Miss Allison had said, there was much to do, and Joanna was not too confident a cook. A round of beef was waiting to be roasted, and my Lord liked it well done, but not too much so. Joanna was preparing the joint for

from a basin, looked like a Botticelli girl.

"Oh, in the parlour, doctor. That way."

Dr. Benn passed on before she could ask him a question.

Magnal was at his desk, correcting a page of manuscript when Dr. Benn entered and softly closed the door. Magnal turned and rose.

"Anything - serious?"

"It is a little early to say, but I don't like the look of her."

"What is it, influenza?"

"More than that, I'm afraid. I suspect an early pneumonia."

Magnal's head went back.

"Good lord! What an extraordinary thing! Why, she nursed me through pneumonia. I'll tell you part of the story, some day, Benn. I suppose you realise who I am?"

Dr. Benn looked a little embarrassed.

"Well, - I have - "

"Of course. Professionally - "

about stethoscopes, and I'm not permitted to prescribe or sign death certificates. Absit omen! Well, ⁴I want everything done that can be done. ⁴She is such a good soul."

"I think she ought to have a nurse."

"Can you get one?"

"I think so. ⁴I'll phone Blenborough. And I'll be over again this afternoon."

"Shall I fetch you?"

"It would save my car. And you might pick up a nurse."

Miss Allison, propped up in bed, flushed, struggling for breath while each breath that she drew hurt her, saw Joanna come into the room with a feeding cup full of hot meat-extract. The girl's face was gentle, her eyes compassionate. She stood by the bed and bent over Elizabeth Allison.

"Try and drink this, Aunt Bess."

Miss Allison closed her eyes and turned her face away.

"I can't ⁴. Don't worry me."

"Please, ⁴ Aunt Bess. ⁴ You must try. ⁴ Keep up

Joanna was non-plussed. She stood hesitant for a moment, and then walked softly out of the room and down the stairs, carrying this cup of refusal. What should she do? Why had Aunt Bess turned away from her? How could she have divined the bitter yet silent hostility of that lonely woman's inward self. - "I want to die. - It is better that I should die." Joanna stood wide-eyed and bewildered in the kitchen. How strange that Aunt Bess should refuse this from her hands!

She heard Magnal moving in the passage. She went out, and with grave and troubled face and the cup in her hands, she appealed to him.

"Aunt Bess won't take this."

"Not take it?"

"No, ⁴ she must, ⁴ mustn't she? ⁴ She seems so - ."

Magnal looked at Joanna's face and then at the cup. He stretched out a hand for it.

"Of course she must. Let me try."

Magnal climbed the stairs, a very large man carefully carrying a very small cup. He did not see himself as a

got to get you through it."

Her eyes were still wet, and her physical distress so evident that Magnal was moved to remember his own struggle for breath.

"You must drink this, my dear. ♪ You got me through, and I'm saying tu quoque. ♪ We'll have a nurse here for you this afternoon."

She looked at him helplessly.

"I'm so sorry - to give all this trouble."

"Trouble? ♪ Good lord, Elizabeth, it's no trouble. Now - drink this."

He bent over her. He put a large hand under her head and supported it while he held the feeding cup to her lips.

"Gently does it. ♪ Must keep your strength up."

Miss Allison put her lips to the spout, ♪ tried to drink, and choked, though how was Magnal to know that emotion was choking her.

She gasped. The stuff ran down her chin.

"I - I'm so sorry. ♪ I've got a handkerchief somewhere."

"Under your pillow?"

"Must I?"

"Yes."

This time she succeeded, taking the stuff with little gulps, and pausing to get her breath. She did not look at him. Being woman she was too conscious of her deplorable plainness, hair anyhow, her upper denture missing, and yet she could not but be aware of his kindness, the gentle, soothing strength of his ^m ~~h~~.

"That's better. 4 "

"Must I take it all?"

"Well, it's nearly gone. Had enough for the moment?"

"Yes."

"Well we will let you off the rest."

He allowed her head to sink into the pillow.

"Now, you just keep quiet. 4 Your job, Elizabeth, is to leave everything to us. 4 We can't do without you, you know."

He backed out of the room, leaving the door ajar, and Miss Allison closed her eyes and lay still.

Joanna met him at the foot of the stairs, and her eyes

"It's too cold up there. She needs a fire."

Joanna turned to go.

"I'll light it. ¶ I'll do it at once."

If Elizabeth Allison wondered, as she fought the pain and the suffocation in her chest, whether she was missed below stairs, she might have been consoled by Joanna's indifferent cooking, and Magnal's meditations. They began with the selfish problem of his own comfort, but quickly enlarged themselves into a compassionate appreciation of what one quiet and loyal woman represented in a house. He twitted himself; he mocked himself. Ye Gods, was it necessary for a woman to be near death, for a man to fear the loss of her and value her as the linchpin of his wheel of fate?

Supposing that Elizabeth were to die? He and Joanna would be left alone in the house, and Magnal, smoking his pipe in front of the fire, discovered with consternation that Joanna disturbed him most poignantly. He was afraid of Joanna, afraid of her youth, her comeliness, her

brother, and eager, passionate man.

Good Lord, whichever way fate jumped, he would be the fly in the spiders' web of elemental necessity! What was he to do about it, he - the seperative creature - who with calm confidence had supposed that he could play the sage, and squatting upon some high hill, look down with superior pity upon the organic whimsies of humanity?

Nurse Millard, cunningly rearranging Miss Allison's pillows, as only an interested nurse can do, administered to the patient words that were more potent than any tonic. If familiarity with sickness breeds hardness, Nurse Millard was the most unfamiliar of creatures. She had been born kind and had remained so.

"Morale, my dear, morale, that's the thing. ♪ Those two downstairs seem lost without you."

Which they were, for Joanna's cooking was temperamental, so much so that Nurse Millard, who could cook and did not refuse a helping hand and stand upon professional dignity,

large cakes. This was about the only contribution mere man could make, besides a daily trip to Melfont for milk, butter, bread and butcher's meat. Nurse Millard was amused by his male magnificence, Joanna less so. And Miss Allison, hearing of the joke from Miss Millard, was secretly consoled.

The two voices were still in conflict. "I want to die," and "I want to live," but the latter was becoming the more dominant.

Magnal would wait for Dr. Benn in the parlour, walking up and down, and biting hard on a pipe.

"Well, Benn, what's today's verdict?"

"Good."

"Well, that's better than good. That nurse you found us is a treasure. She can roast a steak."

Dr. Benn's eyes twinkled behind his glasses.

"Surplus value, sir."

"And digestion without tears."

Joanna might be an inexperienced cook, but her desire to help and her very real affection for Elizabeth Allison drove her innocently up the stairs to wait

Nurse Millard was a little critical of Joanna, for both were dark women, and in the competition for looks Joanna could not be denied the garland. She was in the first, mysterious bloom of youth, cream and dew and star-dust, with a vernal freshness and a perfection of texture that can be tantalising to women who need help. Her impulsiveness might be mistaken for interference, her sparkle for vanity, but it was not easy to say nay to her, and Joanna had the tray. She carried it up with extreme care, and finding Miss Allison's door ajar pushed it open gently with her foot.

"Dinner, & Aunt Bess."

Which was obvious, but Miss Allison, floating on that slack tide which carries the returning life-force to the land, was conscious of a secret pang. How lovely was this child, and how difficult was it to be envious of her, and yet Joanna brought pain and provocation to the woman in the bed.

"Thank you, Joanna."

Joanna placed the tray upon Miss Allison's bed.

"Would you like a cushion, dear?"

"It would be better."

scent. And why? Such little things can rouse emotional suspicion, especially in the sick.

Magnal, shopping in Blenborough, and catching sight of a pot of Cottage Maid tulips in a florist's shop, went in and bought them, also a bunch of Mimosa, and carried them back to Lammas. He had not entered Miss Allison's room since the incident of the feeding cup, but now that she was sitting up in bed he proposed to visit her. Nurse Millard carried up the pot of pink and white tulips and the yellow Mimosa, and displayed them to her patient.

"Mr. Magnal has sent you these."

Miss Allison blushed.

"How kind of him. Aren't they lovely. May I have them on the table?"

Nurse Millard held the yellow wattle so that Elizabeth Allison could smell it.

"Makes you think of Cannes."

"Does it? I have never been there."

"I did - once - with a patient. If I had my way I'd

Nurse Millard was woman, wise as to the sensitiveness of the sex.

"I've got a clean nightie for you, and the lace cap with blue ribbon. ♪ If you feel up to it."

"Yes, perhaps after tea. ♫ There is a bottle of Eau de Cologne on my dressing-table. ♪ And my teeth, - nurse."

"Don't you worry, dear. I won't let him up till you are ready."

Miss Allison had despised aids to beauty, but when Nurse Millard brought in her own vanity-case and attended sympathetically to Miss Allison's complexion, Elizabeth Allison accepted the assistance and was grateful. Moreover, a February sun was shining and Nurse Millard lowered the blind sufficiently to cut off too much crude sunlight. She was a most understanding young woman. When the ritual was complete she presented Miss Allison with her hand-mirror.

"Now - don't you look nice?"

Miss Allison glanced at the mirror as though she feared it. If only her face had bloomed like Joanna's!

conscious of finding her somehow other than he had expected. Miss Allison had a pretty colour, and a curious veiled brightness in her eyes. She looked different, * but just what was the difference? An aetherial quality, a kind of radiance, * mystery.

"Well, * Elizabeth, you have given us a shock."

He crossed over and sat down in the chair, Nurse Millard had placed beside the bed. He had entered feeling paternal and jocular, and perhaps a little patronising, only to discover in himself a surprised shyness.

"Thank you for the flowers, sir."

Magnal glanced at the pot of tulips.

"Oh, that's all right, * Elizabeth. * Harbingers of spring, you know. We'll soon have the spring here. * We have missed you downstairs."

"Have you, sir? * I'm afraid I have been - "

"Look here, * Elizabeth, don't call me sir. * It makes me feel quite ancient. * Besides - ."

Miss Allison's eyelashes flickered.

XXI.

Mediterranean hillsides in the Spring, anemones and asphod^l, wild lavender and rock-rose, the peach in flower, cypresses straight and black against a sapphire sea. Yes, Crete in the Spring, with the vines trailing green sways and garlands over stone loggias, and the olives flickering. The Spring, especially the English Spring, produced in Magnal a romantic restlessness, that urge of the blood towards passion and procreation, disguise it as one may. Moreover, the English Spring tempted you to be ^{hardone} ~~recuse~~ and to quote Browning with a leer at the north-east wind.

"Oh - to be in England!"

Brrh! This English Spring could be held responsible for the Englishman's restlessness, and his adventurous escape into other climes.

But this particular Spring was a Circe, preparing to reduce man to his elementals. Dogs were barking, birds sang, the bluebells were not snowed upon, nor were the leaves of

Witch's Wood emerald domes below him. And Joanna, when she had done her duty at Lammas, followed him to Roman House, and riddled the soil he spaded from his trenches.

Joanna was the Spring. Something had happened to her, or was in the process of happening, the sweet, seductive ^{er} flowing of sex. Her eyes were tender and dewy, her skin had the white bloom of a magnolia flower. Indubitably, she was a very lovely thing, and the sun was warm and the earth fragrant.

Their heads came very close over the spoil in the sieve.

"Oh, - what's this? ^W Look."

Something glistened in the mould, a ring. Magnal's shovel had scratched the green incrustation, and the precious metal showed. He picked it out of the riddle, and rubbed it on the sleeve of his shirt. The thing was a cameo in onyx, the head and face in profile, some goddess crowned with a garland.

They were kneeling opposite each other.

"Findings - keepings, Joanna. Show a finger."

Her eyes lifted to his, and suddenly they were shy of each other. Then - Joanna put the ring to her lips. Her eyes were downcast, but beneath the long black lashes was a tender gleam.

"I'll wear it - always."

Magnal, poignantly aware of her, and suddenly sobered by the urge that was in him, got to his feet and returned to his labour. God, - was he so young, no better than an impulsive boy! This child was in his keeping, and somehow the young bloom of her frightened him. At his age a man had to be sure, cherish a wise ^{one} magnanimity.

But earth was earth on this day in May. The sun was shining, the world rejoicing, and presently Magnal flung down his shovel. This was no morning for scraping up soil. He felt head in air, gaillard, no stooping gravedigger disintering that which was dead.

"Joanna ♀."

"Yes."

"I'm bored with this business. Let's go up to the dew-

was clear of the trench. Her slim and vivid legs challenged him. She ran, with little flicks of her forearms, almost like a bird winging upwards. Magnal laboured. He seemed to labour where she scudded, like a waggon-horse chasing an Arab filly. She kept her lead, and the provocation of it pricked him, and just below the lip of the dewpond he caught her. He picked her up, and wading into the pool, held her cross-wise above the water.

"Now, ♣ Miss Witch, ♣ what about a ducking?"

She clung to him.

"Oh, ♣ you wouldn't!"

"I wonder! ♣ Well, this time I'll let you off."

They sat side by side on the lip of the pool, and looked out over this splendid country, and unaccountably were mute. Joanna's left hand rested on her knee, the fingers spread, and the ring displayed. She was youth - dreaming; her youth looked up at Magnal and wondered. How big and strong he was, strangely strong for his years. He made her feel certain things, but not as she might have dreamed of feeling them. A part of her was a little in awe of him; even that race up the hillside had left her breathless yet not young with him. Almost she had outdistanced him, as a girl of seventeen might outrun a middle-aged father. ♣ Did she appear comely in his eyes? There was that in her which knew

that she did.

He became aware of her scrutiny. He shifted his position and glanced down and obliquely at her. Deep in his eyes she divined a vague, self-searching question. And then he looked away again towards Five Barrow Down.

"Joanna."

She waited. What was he going to say to her?

"Joanna, my dear, try to remember that I feel rather responsible."

Her lashes trembled. Now what did he mean by that?

"I am a rather tough old bird. I've knocked about the world, but I have learned certain things."

She was out of her depth with him. She could not divine that which was in his mind, the generous self-restraint, the hesitant reticence. He was afraid of her, and the lovely and vivid youth in her, and was too magnanimous to clutch at it. He seemed to her just a little pompous, and not young and impulsive like she was.

Their homeward walk to Lammas was outwardly bright and casual, and inwardly embarrassed. They had been near to something and it had eluded them, but it followed them like a shadow. Joanna, sedate and serious, paused to pick a sprig of blue veronica.

"What's that?"

Magnal told her, feeling half schoolmaster, half father. It appeared to be devilish difficult to cut out those twenty-five years, and play the lover to this girl of seventeen. Why not eliminate the romantic struggle and revert to the big-brother phase[?] ~~when neither of them had been seased in sex self-consciousness?~~ Their companionship had seemed so smooth and easy when they had been working together on Roman House.

Said Magnal, searching for something to say: "We shall have to include the flora and fauna of Downland in our monumental book."

She had kept the sprig of veronica and she held it to her nose.

"Yes. * It doesn't smell."

"We need the wild thyme and onion for that."

"Are there wild onions?"

"Yes, and hedge garlic. But we won't illustrate the smells."

His humour laboured, and he felt it to be fortyish. Moreover, her exquisite young face had the blankness of some sense of bewilderment and frustration.

Bob jumped the wall to meet them, and Magnal was glad of the dog's intervention. This very natural creature had no emotions to analyse and chasten. Joanna must have felt

as Magnal did, for she melted to the dog, became a mere playful child, and frisked about with him on those pretty, vivid legs.

Magnal lunched alone, and somehow it was a relief to be alone, so that he did not witness the incident that passed between Elizabeth Allison and Joanna. Miss Allison and Joanna were sitting down together, and Miss Allison was carving the leg of mutton. She passed Joanna her plate, and as Joanna set it down Miss Allison's eyes discovered the ring. She looked at it fixedly, and with such concentration that Joanna became conscious of her gaze.

"Where did you get that, my dear?"

Miss Allison knew that it was an unwise question, but it seemed to come blurring from her.

"That? + Oh, we found it."

"When you were - ?"

"Yes, a funny old thing, isn't it?"

Miss Allison saw nothing funny in the ring upon the girl's finger. So, Magnal had given it to her, and she was displaying it. The ring was a symbol, and a most unwelcome symbol to Elizabeth Allison.

Magnal went up alone that afternoon to Greenbury, for Miss Allison had reminded Joanna that she was needed in the house. There was the week's washing to be ironed and put away, either in the Lamm's linen-cupboard, or in various chests of drawers. Joanna, ironing one of my lord's shirts, was very conscious of that ring, and of the strange disapproval she had divined in Miss Allison's eyes and voice. Why should Aunt Bess disapprove? Was there anything unseemly in her wearing a funny old ring like this, even though Magnal had given it to her? Joanna was troubled. Had this gift been no more than a casual gift, or had it that other significance of which youth dreams? If a young man had given it to her the inference and its associated emotion would have been different.

On the grassy plateau below Greenbury Magnal, in shirt and shorts, was sweating at his labour, as though he could exhaust the problem by tiring himself out. Solitude and sweat might have their virtues, but that thorn in the flesh remained with him. Was he behaving like a middle-aged fool, soused in second youth, and finding that his emotional efforts creaked and were out of rhythm with youth's tempo? This was not just an affair, like old wine to be sniffed, savan^{our}~~ed~~, drank^u and forgotten. He was glad to be alone, and yet he missed that other presence, oh, yes, most damnably so. The sweet anguish of sex! Yes, how apt and ruthless was the

phrase!

The shovelling and sifting of soil began to bore him. You could not exorcise an obsession by tiring out your muscles. He gave it up after a while, putting spade and pick away, he climbed the hill and sat down on the same spot that he and Joanna had shared in the morning. The great spaces of hill and sky might soothe him. What a marvellous landscape was this, so full of significance and so empty of humanity! Nothing on two legs crawled anywhere upon those great green cushions or in the velvet valleys. - Damn it, why all this hesitation, this pusillanimous grubbing? Was he a committee of the emotions and the moralities, sitting round a table, and squabbling and debating and getting nowhere?

Why not be man, and behave like man?

A woman might understand that, and nothing else.

XXII.

Miss Golden Head, sitting in a melancholy mood in the office of "The White Hart" at Camden Tracey, saw the young man enter the lounge. He was bare-headed, carried a pack and a haversack, wore a green shirt open at the throat, and old-gold coloured corduroy trousers. Miss Golden Head was bored with the hotel books and with Camden Tracey, and this young and colourful figure brought her to the office window with a welcoming readiness that is somewhat rare in English country inns. The young man was good to look upon, even if the simplicity of his simplicity was somewhat studied. He had an air, a glossy-black head, a little moustache, sensitive if sensual lips, and eyes that were sleepy and insolent.

Miss Golden Head smiled at him * "A what can I do for you, darling?" smile.

"Got a room?"

"I think so."

"I want a quiet room. No traffic, no bar."

He did not look quiet to Miss Golden Head, but that might be part of his pose.

"I can give you one over the garden."

"Thanks."

"How long will you be staying?"

"Oh, a day or two. Just trekking around."

"Will you sign the book, sir."

He signed it, as though presenting Miss Golden Head with his autograph, and he underlined it with a thick, black sweep of the pen. She took him upstairs to show him the bedroom, and he accepted it, after being told that the bathroom was just opposite. Miss Golden Head returned to her office and the visitors' book, and read his name.

Hubert Blore. What a queer name! And it rhymed with her mood of the moment, though he did not look a bore. She saw that he had given an address in Bloomsbury.

Mr. Hubert Blore idled about Camden Tracey for a couple of days, for, in its architecture it was an exquisite old town, ~~if a little backward in its education and its ethics.~~ It held a market once a week, and became full of cattle and pigs and farm produce, and hearty agriculturists and their wives. The farmers' "Ordinary" continued to be respected at The White Hart. Camden Tracey possessed a Corn Exchange, and a very famous abbey church, and a Market Hall beloved of black and white artists, and had Hubert Blore belonged to the naughty nineties, he might have written of dabbling his hands in Gothic mysteries. He dabbled in many things, poetry, belles' letters, and impudent criticism of his elders. He called

himself a communist, but like many of that ilk, he loved himself very dearly and was convinced that nothing was too good for Hubert Blore. His absence from London was due to various disharmonies, the vulgar prejudices of tradesmen in the matter of cash, and the pervas^{ive}ity of a certain petticoat. No one knew where Mr. Hubert Blore happened to be for the moment, and he did not want them to know. His London landlady had been given to understand that he had gone off to climb Welsh mountains, and since he had paid up before leaving, she did not worry about his whereabouts.

Mr. Hubert Blore and Camden Tracey did not for long entertain each other. He paid his bill and disappeared, somewhat to the chagrine of the Office. He did not take to the Welsh mountains, even though in profile he bore some resemblance to a handsome goat. A maiden aunt of his had a house at Stoneton, and Hubert Blore paid her occasional and unexpected visits, remained for a couple of nights, and left her - usually with a cheque in his pocket. Miss Carden's nephew could be a very charming young man, especially when the play's title was "Open Sesame". People liked him, provided that they did not see too much of him, and find themselves being exploited by a delightful and ruthless young egoist whose text was "Love thyself - always and

everywhere". He was amusing; he had a pert tongue and a mischievous wit, and a subtle sense of the ridiculous in others. He could mimic Mr. Baldwin or the Archbishop of Canterbury. If you were a woman, and very sympathetic and admiring he might recite you some of his own sonnets, or the queer, staccato poetry that was in the fashion.

Hubert Blore ^{followed} ~~took~~ the Melfont St. Giles road, but when the downlands opened before him, he diverged and took to the rolling grassland. He liked things soft under his feet, soft and flowery, and a little succulent. He had some twenty miles to cover, but what are twenty miles to a sprightly lad of seven and twenty? He would surprise Aunt Edith in the cool of the evening, and play the pretty Puck to her, and she would get out her sherry, and half a bottle of her Nuits St. George, for Miss Carden had a cellar and a considerable income. She thought Hubert charming and clever, and so - affectionate, and was always ready with her garland. Stoneton was not an exciting little town, and though Miss Carden was a rapturous gardener, and visited Chelsea every year, it was pleasant to have one's garden invaded by a faun, though, of course, Miss Carden did not see her nephew in that pagan shape.

Pose had become so much a habit with Hubert Blore that

even this downland country was a stage for his cold but sensual little self. The hills were his and the valleys, and this superb May weather, sleekly turfed and sunlit for his passage. "Good morning, hills, good morning, valleys. How do you like me this morning? Isn't it pleasant for you to be visited by Apollo?" Even an upland breeze had its duties, to blow through Hubert's hair, that glossy, undulating hair made to be stroked by feminine hands. The flowering turf was pied with colour for his poet's feet. He could glance down at those colourful and Bohemian trousers, and see them as divine decoration for a very straight and lustful pair of legs.

It was indeed a perfect springtime, still, cloudless, its golden lights faintly hazed with heat. The face of a nature was like the face of a young girl, suddenly exquisite with the soft bloom of sex. Hubert Blore had left the Camden Tracey chestnuts in full flower, candles of white wax erect amid the fresh young foliage. Late tulips had speared up in cottage gardens from a blue mist of myosotis. Dew still sparkled in the shade. Under the beeches of Witch's Wood the sheeted bluebells scented the air.

Now, Hubert Blore had passed this way before. He knew that by following the Mistbourne and its valley he could eliminate Melfont St. Giles, and find open country and soft

turf under his feet until he struck the Melfont-Stoneton road. He knew of ruined Mistover, and had put this deserted village into blank versa^e, and with a peculiar and characteristically sinister complexion. He had never heard of a creature called Modred Magnal, nor did he know that Mistover had come alive.

It so happened that on this May morning Magnal had started out to drive Miss Allison into Blenborough for an hour's shopping, but he had forgotten something and had stopped the car on the fringe of the thorns and gone back to Lammas.

"Jo-anna!"

He had surprised her bending over his desk in the parlour, and through the open casement they had gazed at each other.

"I was - just - dusting."

Why had she looked at him in that strange way, as though he had come upon her suddenly like some unfamiliar visitor?

"That's all right. ~~W~~ I had forgotten about that Samian bowl. I wanted to try and date it."

There had been rigidity about her that had puzzled him, a sense of resistance, but to what?

"I'll fetch it."

"Can you?"

"Yes. I can leave Bob in charge."

Magnal had returned to the car and Miss Allison with a peculiar feeling of frustration. Youth - at an open window in May, had looked at him as a girl might look at her father when her mood was secret and not for him to share. He had been conscious of a little stab of anguish as though her exquisite aloofness had dated him to himself. Forty nine and seventeen! Damn it, was he falling to the old-old folly, of feeling himself amorously young, with grey hairs in his head? He restarted the car, and drove with self-absorbed roughness along the grassy track. The car bumped and swayed, and he did not notice it, but Miss Allison did. She knew his face even better than she knew her own, its moods, and subtle manifestations, its lines and shadows. Had she not studied this man, because she loved him?

Now, what had Joanna done or said, or not done or failed to say?

A super-bump brought a little murmur from her, not of protest, but of instinctive disturbance. Her hat had come in contact with the car's hood.

"Hallo ! Sorry, Elizabeth."

He glanced at her momentarily. She was resettling her hat.

"Afraid I forgot the rough water."

He slowed down. She was aware of his powerful hands gripping the wheel. What great strong hands he had! She seemed to divine a girding fierceness in him.

She answered him gently, for, maybe she was divining the beginnings of some other disillusionment, disharmonies that creaked like the car's springs as it rolled over the rough road. Was he finding youth unsympathetic to his mellow maleness? Who was it who had said that youth can be so lovely to look at and so impossible to know? September and April speak a different language.

"I'm afraid I am rather ~~h~~ a light weight. ~~u~~ I bounce too easily."

Her little piece of playfulness passed over him.

"I expect you lost weight, ~~u~~ Elizabeth, when you were ill."

"I think I must have done."

There was no more conversation between them, but Miss Allison noticed that he was rough with the car when they reached the main road. He took his corners with cruelty, and drove the car hard at the hills. And in Miss Allison there was no fear, but only secret exultation. Perhaps he had begun to find youth out?

Space

313.

Hubert Blore, leaving Bareacres Farm and Ash Wood on his right, followed the Mistbourne valley along the flank of Dead Man's Down. He saw Witch's Wood, almost incredibly green before him, and the slopes of the down beyond. Yes, that was Greenbury, the hill with the dewpond on it, like a star in a diadem. He and Miss Garden had picnicked there one summer day before he had left Oxford. Hubert Blore had a packet of hotel sandwiches and a bottle of beer in his haversack, and the idea of lunching up there by the dewpond piqued him. He skirted the flowing fringes of the beech wood, and climbing the sharp slope to the plateau cut in the hill's flank, he came suddenly upon the scene of Magnal's labours. He saw the trenches and the banks of earth and the pattern of the excavations, the black tarpaulins, the timber hut with its red Dutch tiles. Blore stood at gaze. Hallo, ~~what~~ what was this? Archaeology, some professional person exploring the past with pick and shovel? Well, why not have a look round? There appeared to be no one in possession.

He had taken three steps forward when the door of the hut opened, and the girl stood there, holding a red bowl in her hands. She was looking down at the bowl, and for the moment she did not see him. Blore had the sun behind ^{him}, and the advantage of that first interested stare, and stare he did with a sudden kindling of his senses. Gosh, how surprising,

this lovely-looker in her saffron frock powdered with dark blue flowers. Hair black as coal, red berries for lips. A skin like magnolia petals. Did her eyes match her hair? They should do. And who was she? The professional person's secretary? She did not look the part. Or did professional persons ever possess such a lovely as a daughter?

Then, she raised her eyes and saw him, and they were black velvet, and taken by surprise. She had what Hubert had described in one of his exotic fragments as "The grape-girl's glance". Why so serious, sweet maid? Blore showed his very white teeth below his little black moustache. His head was cocked, his air - playful.

"Excuse me, am I trespassing?"

Of course he was, and he knew it, and somehow she knew that he knew it. In fact, she knew all sorts of things about him with instant clarity. The glitter of his youth, its irony and insolence matched the glamour of hers. Pan had invaded the hills, and the pretty cloven hoof was his.

She seemed to steady herself before answering him, like a child on a village stage, putting her lips in order before beginning to recite.

"Yes, you are."

"Apologies."

He jumped a trench and came nearer, and suddenly she was conscious of a wildness in her self, the provoking playfulness of the filly in the presence of the prancing colt. She looked down and up at him, and her eyes were very dark.

"Archaeology, ~~what?~~ Very intriguing. ~~What's that~~ you have, a bit of Samian?"

She nodded solemnly, her eyes still on him, watchful yet wayward eyes.

"A Roman site. - I say, those Roman fellows could select a landscape."

He looked about him, and then jumped another trench, and was nearer.

"I was going to eat my lunch up by the dew-pond. Know it?"

"Of course I know it."

He laughed.

"Possessive as all that! ~~What~~ It is not your pigeon, I suppose?"

"What?"

"This - exploring of the past. ~~Who's~~ Who's the professional patron?"

"What do you mean?"

"Who runs this show?"

"Mr. Magnal."

"Magnal. A University sage?"

"No, A he owns all the A land here."

"What, the whole lovely landscape?"

She nodded, and he came nearer. She was very still, almost as though the wildness in her was prepared for flight. He was smiling, and there was a challenging slyness in his smile.

"May I look?"

He took the bowl from her hands, and his way of doing it was casual but masterful.

"Rather a crude product."

He turned the bowl upside down, and his handling of it was careless.

"Oh, A do be careful!"

"Precious?"

"Yes."

"Does the dear old Prof. value it so highly?"

She recovered the bowl from him.

"Yes. It's a fine specimen. We want to try and date it by the maker's name. And I have to draw it."

"You illustrate?"

"Yes."

She held the Samian bowl with both hands against her body, as though protecting it and something in herself.

Blore's lids had narrowed. There was a sleepy sheen in his eyes.

"Won't you show me round?"

"I have to get back."

"To the dear old Prof.? And where?"

"Oh - down there, ' Mistover."

"Mistover! ' Why, that's a dead place."

"Not now."

He turned and looked towards Mistover, and the thatch of Lammas showed amid the thorns.

"That's where you perch?"

"Yes."

"I see."

He dropped the pack from his shoulders to the ground.

"Needn't hump that around while you show me the ruins, need I?"

"Really, ' I must - ."

"Have a heart. ' I'm interested in Roman remains, and other - things. Better introduce myself, hadn't I. My name's Blore, Hubert Blore. ' I write."

She gave him an almost frightened look.

"I don't think - I - "

"Needn't apologise. ' I'm new, just arriving. ' And your's?"

"Joanna Foster."

"Joanna. How - maidenly! Well, * where do we begin?"

Her effort at aloofness amused him. Almost she had become stiff and gawky like some village girl. Rather attractive, this virginal resistance!

"Why not put that blessed bowl down. You'll drop it, and then - what will the old man say?"

"He isn't an old man."

Blore's goatlike head went up. If he laughed, his laugh was soundless.

"Apologies to the Prof. - Now, please demonstrate."

She stood hesitant. She made as though to place the bowl on the grass, but straightened, clasped it, and turned away.

"Sorry, * I really must go."

This time his laughter was not soundless, but like a little exultant neighing.

"I get you. * Well, * I won't let you in for a lecture, Joanna. May I call on the professor? - Be the little gentleman?"

But she was gone, scudding down the grass slope on her slim, long legs, and cherishing her treasure. What a filly, wild and winsome and provoking, a yea and nay girl. Blore stood and watched her. There was no backward glance, no wavering. Well, well, * well, how easily he had disturbed

her! He lit a cigarette, strolled around, explored the hut and looked at some of the exhibits and her drawings. Temperament - what! Then he collected his pack and climbed lazily up the slopes of Greenbury. He sat down by the dew-pond. He was smiling. He bent over the pool and looked at his reflection in the water. It was the Narcissus pose, and perhaps he knew it.

XXIII.

Hubert Blore sat and gazed, ate his sandwiches, and drank his beer, and he drank it out of the bottle. A good English drink - this, but not quite suited to the decor. The juice of the grape, & what, & Falernian or Greek wine, douce and fragrant and lusciously pagan like the face of that girl? Joanna! Yes, the name had a nice, southern flavour, but Is^eult would have fitted her black and white wildness more sleekly. She was like Is^eult in Maurice Hewlett's "Forest Lovers". A colourful old stuffer, Hewlett, but dead and out of date.

Blore lit a cigarette, and let it dangle lazily out of the corner of his ~~sensuous~~ mouth. He looked down at Mistover. A woozy place, & that, reminiscent of Glastonbury and Holy Thorn, and the dear old Prae Raph. cult. What sort of fellow was this Magnal? Well, damn it, he either had no eyes at all, or a darned nice taste in secretaries. No eyes at all - probably, or the wench would not still be a virgin. The promiscuous and experienced male in Blore had divined in her the virgin. Wild and chaste! How - appealing! Magnal? One of those dull old stuffers who ^udig up bones, and produced monographs, and decorated their waistcoats with gravy and tobacco ash.

Hubert Blore's glance travelled southwards, and came to

rest upon distant Bareacres. A farm. Why shouldn't he put up there, and attempt a further investigation of Joanna? * Yes, why not? Dear Aunt Edith had no knowledge of his being in the neighbourhood, and she did not expect him. Miss Carden and her "Nuits St. George" could wait. Here was other wine, a girl with eyes like grapes. Hubert Blore smiled, and ran a caressing finger along his moustache.

"Veni, vidi - !"

He picked up the empty beer-bottle and sent it splashing into the dewpond, a barbarian gesture. He watched the ripples spread and die away. Yes, by Shaw and all the prophets he might find a pleasant little adventure in this Wiltshire valley.

So, Hubert Blore came down from the heights of Greenbury into the Mistover valley, and bore towards Ash Wood and Bare-acres, and it so happened that Magnal's car passed along the track just as the young man was descending the hill. Someone saw that little, distant figure and that someone was not Magnal. Miss Allison watched it and was silent. She glanced half surreptitiously at Magnal, but Magnal's eyes were on the road, and Miss Allison remained silent. They came to Lammas and unloaded the car at the gate before Magnal, with Bob careering beside it, drove the car round into the yard. Elizabeth Allison walked slowly into the house, to find

Joanna laying the parlour table, ~~for lunch~~.

"You might help with the parcels, dear."

"Yes, Aunt Bess."

Miss Allison gave Joanna's face a glance of careful scrutiny, but she asked no questions. There might be nothing in the incident, nothing at all, and yet Miss Allison gathered the impression that something had occurred to disturb Joanna. The girl seemed rather too eager to help, a little over-animated, and her eyes were not set quite right in the picture. Miss Allison saw the red bowl standing on Magnal's desk. So, Joanna had been to Greenbury. Had she met anyone? Had there been any significance in the presence of that other figure? Miss Allison held her tongue.

Then, Magnal came in, just as Joanna was carrying in a dish of fruit, purple grapes, a hot-house product, one of the luxuries the Master allowed himself.

"Hullo, ~~W~~ Joanna, you brought the bowl down."

"Yes."

Magnal picked it up and turned it over. He was not conscious of the girl's strange scrutiny. She seemed to be appraising him with a new and critical attentiveness. The old man? ~~But he was not so old as that.~~

Miss Allison and Joanna sat down to their mid-day meal. Joanna chattered, but her eyes were silent. Her tongue might

be active, but a part of her self sat and gazed at something that was elsewhere. She asked perfunctory questions; they sounded so to Elizabeth Allison. Miss Allison asked no questions. She was garnering impressions. Had Aunt Bess remembered the bottled olives? He - had such a liking for olives. Miss Allison had not forgotten. The question was superfluous. She did not forget such things. It was not a comfortable meal, and Joanna was not herself, and Miss Allison was asking those silent questions.

Magnal, with a pipe in his mouth, put his head into their sitting-room.

"Oh, Joanna, can you give me a hand this afternoon? There is a promising piece of soil to sieve."

Joanna went rigid, one hand pressing against the edge of the table.

"I - I've got some mending to do."

Magnal looked at her curiously, and with sudden flicks of self-chastisement, accepted the repulse.

"Oh, all right; another time will do."

He closed the door, and they heard his footsteps pass away along the passage. Miss Allison had given Joanna one guarded glance. Why was Joanna looking frightened? Mending - indeed! The excuse was utterly inadequate. Miss Allison, with very thoughtful eyes, rose from her chair.

"If you care to go, Joanna, I can - ."

"Oh, no, Aunt Bess. I don't like leaving so much to you."

Hubert Blore opened the garden gate of Bareacres, and strolled up to the farmhouse door. It was a garden by courtesy, and in reality a bleak little patch of unkempt grass with a few neglected rose-trees growing in two round and weedy beds. A clothes line was looped between an apple tree and one of the wooden pillars of the porch, and on it hung one of John Wise's shirts, two dishcloths, and a pair of socks. Blore knocked.

John Wise had gone forth to his labours, and Mary Wise and her girl were washing-up.

"Someone at the door, Mrs. Wise."

"Who can that be? Go and see, Jenny."

Jenny went and discovered the decorative young man upon the doorstep. Now, Blore, when he wanted anything from a woman, young or old, plain or pretty, could put on an air that aped the simple charm of smiling, unsophisticated youth, and Jenny was not old, and had looks of a florid order.

"Excuse me, do you - by chance ever let rooms?"

"I don't know as we do."

"You see - I'm on a hiking holiday, and I just want a

bedroom and simple meals."

"I'll go and ask Mrs. Wise."

She left him on the doorstep, and went to carry the news to her mistress. It was a young gentleman who wanted a bedroom and board while he was on a holiday.

"What sort of young gentleman?"

"A nice young gentleman."

Mrs. Wise looked doubtful, but - after all - Bareacres was a very dull place, and a farmer's wife in these desperate days might be glad to make a pound or two. She coveted a new carpet, and her pillow-cases were falling to pieces. Mrs. Wise wiped her hands on the roller towel, and went to speak with the young gentleman.

He appeared to be a shy young man. He hoped he was not being impertinent, but he loved the open country, and a delightful old farmhouse like this. He smiled all the time, and he looked at Mrs. Wise as though he found her worth looking at.

"I may only be here a week or so. I want quite simple meals. I love farmhouse food."

Mrs. Wise was moved to agree with Jenny. He was a nice young gentleman, and so very good looking. She did not consider the consulting of her husband necessary. The young gentleman could have his meals in the parlour which was never

used save on rare Sundays when company was present.

"I think I could manage it."

Blore appeared embarrassed.

"I hate to ask, ⁴ but how much should I - ?"

"Would thirty shillings a week be too much?"

He smiled at her.

"Yes, I could manage that."

Hubert Blore explored Mistover by moonlight. ^u

Bareacres had accepted him as one of those innocent young men from London who carry precious little books about with them, and grow ecstatic over a cow's eyes and the smell of hay, and cannot tell wheat from barley, ~~or a heifer from a steer~~. He showed to the Wises a bright and boyish candour, and spoke of nature in a way that a countryman never speaks of it. He gave John Wise a packet of tobacco, and leaned upon the rickyard gate with him, and was guileless and talkative.

"Wonderful country you have, Mr. Wise. ⁴ Such atmosphere. It makes me feel so superfluous."

John Wise smoked his pipe, and rumbled. Hubert Blore was a new specimen, but he seemed quite harmless. In his own dumb way John Wise might love this country, but he was not eloquent about it.

"Have all these hills names?"

"They have, sir."

"Can you tell me them?"

Mr. Wise was obliging.

"And what is that funny green mound down there? It looks like a clump of trees."

"That be Mistover, sir."

"A village?"

"It used to be before the water failed."

"But isn't that the roof of a house sticking up?"

"It be, sir. That be Lammas, Mr. Magnal's place."

"But if there is no water?"

"There be water now, sir. Mr. Magnal he came camping here, and he liked this wild bit o' country and bought it. And dang it - if the Mistbourne didn't break a week or two after he'd signed the contract."

"Gosh," said the young man, "quite a miracle! But what a strange place to choose, Mr. Wise."

"Mr. Magnal be a bit of a character."

"I should say so. ♡ What does he do?"

"He be one of they - antikarian gentlemen, or whatever you call it."

"Oh, ♡ I see. A student of the past. ♡ An old gentleman, I suppose?"

Mr. Wise smoked and rumbled. He always rumbled after his evening meal.

"Well, * I wouldn't say that, sir. Somewhere this side of fifty, I reckon."

Hubert Blore lit a second cigarette.

"These hills must look wonderful by moonlight, Mr. Wise."

"Well, maybe they do, sir."

"There's a full moon, isn't there?"

"There be."

"I really must go out and see them by moonlight."

Hubert Blore, hands in trouser pockets, head cocked, strolled up the moonlit track between the thorns. The may flower was out, and the night warm and still, and the scent of the blossom hung in the air. May-flower and a girl! For, to Hubert Blore, as to most young men, nature as a study in aesthetics, was linked with sex. What a mysterious place, like some haunted grave in the old legends; the lair of a magician. It would be interesting to catch a glimpse of this fellow, Mr. Modred Magnal, interesting and perhaps necessary. The moon was brilliant, and the outlines of the old cottages stood out stark and black in the tangled growth. Then, Blore saw another light, and paused. It came from one of the Lammas windows, a window on the ground floor. The

curtains had not been drawn, and a figure was moving about the room. ~~It seemed to be a woman's.~~

Blore had impudent courage - of a sort. Supposing it was the girl? Well, why not cultivate a nice audacity and go and take a look-see? He did not use the gate, but scrambled over the flint wall. The moonlight made all the details clear, and he strolled cautiously across the grass towards the house. He could see another window that was lit, that of the library, but the curtains were drawn. Magnal was writing up his daybook.

Hubert Blore reached the wall of the house, and moved along it to the window. Flat against the wall he stood listening. He seemed to hear a faint sound like the rustling of paper. Undoubtedly it was the secretary-girl, jocund Joanna, busy about the old man's affairs. Well, he would give her a surprise.

He moved in front of the window. A female figure was bending over the desk. It seemed to become suddenly aware of that other presence, for it looked up, and the surprise was Hubert Blore's.

For a second or two Elizabeth Allison and the young man stared at each other, silently, intently. Then, Miss Allison's hand reached out for the handle of the casement, but the trespasser's figure slid swiftly to one side and vanished.

Miss Allison stood very still, confronting the significance of this human manifestation. She put a hand to her cheek, and her face was a mask of thought. Then, she turned, walked out into the passage, and paused outside the library door. She ought to tell him what she had seen.

Her hand went out, hesitated, sank to her side. She moved softly away and along the passage to the staff sitting-room. The door was ajar, and looking through the crack of the hinge she could see ^JJoanna sitting at the table, making a sketch of the Samian bowl. Joanna appeared to be absorbed in her work, but was this air of absorption actual?

XXIV.

Magnal had put his pen aside. Thoughts, so coloured with emotion, which crowded his consciousness and clamoured for expression, were not quite fit to be recorded in an archaeologist's day-book. ~~They might be as old as time, and as disturbingly young as the smell of the mayflower, but a man of mature years should choose to keep such elementary reactions to himself, and not transfer them to paper.~~ - Now, why had Joanna refused to go with him ~~up~~ to Roman House? Was it that she was wiser in her actual youth than he was in his second youth, and having found herself at the crossroads with him, had been moved to pause and point a finger. "My way is not your way. Seventeen and forty-nine cannot climb hills together."

Bob was on the hearthrug, and suddenly he pricked his ears and growled. The dog had heard a sound which his master had missed, and Bob was so sure that he had heard some prowler that he was not to be pacified, and Bob was right. The lattice was open, and the dog was up, and barking, with his paws on the windowsill, nor would he be silenced. He looked round at Magnal and went on barking.

In fact, Hubert Blore in a rather hasty retreat over the wall, had dislodged one of the coping stones from the rotten old mortar, and though the stone had fallen on the grass, the

dog had heard it.

"Quiet, my lad, why all this pot^hter?"

Bob was not to be silenced, and Magnal rose from his chair.

"All right, let's go and look."

He went to the door, but the dog, realising that the hunt was on, made his exit through the open window. Miss Allison had returned to the sitting-room, and had sat down with her work-basket, when she heard Bob give tongue. For a moment her hands paused and she sat and listened, her eyes turned towards Joanna. Had this incident any meaning for Joanna? Seemingly, it had not, for the girl's pencil continued to move as though Bob's barking had no message for her.

They heard Magnal's door open, and the sliding back of the bolts of the porch door. Miss Allison sat rigid, her eyes watching Joanna.

"I wonder what is worrying Bob?"

Joanna's pencil did not pause, nor did she raise her eyes from the drawing-pad.

"Perhaps he has smelt a fox."

Miss Allison's head appeared to give a little jerk. A fox? Well, might not the simile be somewhat apposite? Her lips were pressed together, as though emphasising her studied reticence. Then, she selected a sock and a card of wool from

the basket, and got to work.

Silence. She could hear the old clock ticking. And then there was another sound, a sudden distant yelp. Again, Miss Allison's hands became motionless. Her grey eyes were fixed upon Joanna.

"There must have been - someone."

Joanna raised her head, and her eyes met Miss Allison's.

"What, ♫ Aunt Bess?"

"Didn't you hear the dog ♫ yelp?"

"No."

Miss Allison rose.

"I hope he isn't hurt."

Magnal was at the gate. The dog's cry of pain had brought him storming out into the moonlight, natural man whose dog has been kicked by some dastardly tramp. He might be within a year of fifty, but outdoor work had made him as tough as some woodman or farm labourer, and far more limber in his movements.

"Hallo, ♫ Bob, ♫ hallo."

He stood still a moment, listening, and then he saw the dog lolloping towards him on three legs, one fore-paw held up. Damn the blackguard, whoever he might be! Magnal went to meet the dog, and bent down and caressed him, and gently handled the hurt paw. Someone's boot, no doubt, or a tramp's stick.

"Wait there, old man."

Bob lay down to lick his paw, and Magnal went striding down the moonlit track. If the gentleman had taken to his heels he would be out there in the open, and perhaps in sight, for the thorns were too thick for any fugitive to break through them. Magnal came to the open country, and stood at gaze, but there was no live thing to be seen here. He waited for a couple of minutes, his big hands still itching to lay themselves upon the man who had hurt his dog. Then he turned, and walked slowly back towards Lammas. Hubert Blore, lying flat under a protecting thorn, raised his chin from his wrists and saw that great bearded figure pass in the moonlight. Hubert Blore lay still. He might poke fun at fusty old gentlemen, but this particular specimen looked ominously large and fierce. That damned dog had bitten him, and been booted, but Blore was not tempted at the moment to advertise his grievance.

Bob was still licking a bruised paw, and Magnal picked him up and carried him like a child into Lammas. Miss Allison and Joanna, both busy with darning-needle and pencil, became aware of the presence, an angry and compassionate presence, with Bob making efforts to lick his master's nose.

"The blackguard must have kicked the dog, or used a stick. No, * I didn't catch him. I wish I had."

Miss Allison slipped the sock she was darning from off her hand.

"Not broken? ♡ Poor darling!"

"Feel the bone, ♡ Elizabeth. ♡ Fact is - I'm a soft hearted fool when an animal is hurt."

Joanna did not rise, but sat watching Miss Allison gently feeling the dog's paw. Bob made no protest, but lay in Magnal's arms, and looked into Miss Allison's face.

"It seems all right to me."

"Just bruised, I expect. ♡ Come on, old man. I'll put him on that cushion."

♡Bob was lowered into an armchair, and lay looking at the company as though he rather liked being the centre of interest, and the recipient of so much sympathy.

"Do you think we ought to put on a cold bandage?"

Magnal was silent for a moment, watching the dog.

"No, ♡ let's leave well alone. If he is limping tomorrow I'll take him to see a vet."

Miss Allison resumed her seat, but with her chair turned so that she could watch the dog.

Said Magnal ♡ "I wonder who the fellow was? ♡ If I had caught him - !"

Miss Allison was silent.

Hubert Blore was making for Bareacres. He had suffered both in dignity and in his trousers, for Bob, overtaking the retreating trespasser, had got his teeth into the seat of those ornamental bags. Moreover, they were the only trousers that Blore possessed at the moment, nor was their wound in the place of honour. Damn that infernal dog! It had been a lucky kick that had put one of the beast's legs out of action, but the damage remained.

Blore, well away from Mistover and its unwelcoming inhabitants, had paused to explore the hole. Yes, actually, the tail of his shirt was protruding, and the timeless hills had lost their mystery. Blore was feeling spiteful, and in no moonlight mood. He might ask himself why he had not dared to leave the umbrage of the thorns and tackle that fellow with the beard. "I say, sir, your dog has bitten me." Rather a large and ominous person, this Magnal. There might have been other sorts of umbrage.

But the need of the moment was for a needle and thread, and a salve for his vanity. Juan had not played a very picturesque part. And, no doubt, that confounded woman had described their mutual confrontation. Oh well, this was not the end of the story. A little guile might be indicated, and some ingenious and ingenuous lying.

Bareacres was preparing to go to bed when Hubert Blore

returned. He found the front door ajar, but no light in the passage. He was fumbling when a voice hailed him.

"Be that you, sir?"

"It is."

"You'll find a candle on the table."

He lit it, closed the door and sneaked up the stairs. That rent in his trousers could wait until the morning. And in the morning his impudence was head in air. With the house well awake, he stood at the head of the stairs and called to the maiden.

"Jenny."

Jenny was at his service.

"Yessir?"

"Oh, ♫ Jenny, will you ask Mrs. Wise if she can lend me a needle and thread. I've shed a button."

"Can I do it for you, sir?"

"No, thanks, my dear, ♫ I can manage."

So, Hubert had his needle and a length of black cotton, and he sat on his bed and cobbled up the gash in his old-gold breeches. It was not a very visible blemish, and even if anybody noticed it they need not know how the thing had happened, and while he stitched he meditated upon the most ingenious method of getting even with Mr. Magnal and his dog, and into closer contact with Joanna.

How glib was the actor!

Magnal, setting out with a scythe over his shoulder, and bound for Roman House where, most strangely, nettles had sprung into rampant growth about some of the foundations, did not suspect that someone had been watching for him from the shelter of the thorns. He was reflecting upon the curious habits and life histories of plants, and how nettles, man, and his debris were always associated, when Hubert Blore left the wing where he had been waiting, and took the stage. He appeared in the green alleyway with a bright and boyish face and an air of eager ingenuousness that was almost feminine.

"Excuse me, is it Mr. Magnal?"

The man with the scythe did not look as old as Father Time, but inwardly he was startled by the sudden colourfulness of youth. He stood still, and his eyes were not welcoming.

"Yes."

"I have come to apologise. * You see - I'm afraid I was a trespasser last night. * I came out - "

He paused, for a moment, aware of the sudden ominous hardening of the other man's eyes.

"So - it was - you."

"Yes, please wait a moment. * I used to know this part of the world * a little, and when I knew it - this was a dead corner. I wanted to have a look at the place by moonlight, and I'm afraid - I made an ass of myself. You see - I did

not realise - ."

Magnal's silence did not help him out.

"Well, * that anybody lived here - except you, ~~and where~~ - .
Then, your dog came after me and I'm afraid I did a guy.
Silly, - but one does silly things, you know."

"At times, - yes." said Magnal.

"Well, * your dog caught me. * I was just a bit scared,
and I let out a kick. A I'm afraid I may have hurt your
dog. Have I?"

Almost, in his nice and boyish eagerness his words
tumbled over themselves, and Magnal, considering him as man,
placed him among the poets and the pansies.

"I am afraid you did."

"I'm so sorry."

"But not seriously. A bruised paw. Nothing broken, I
think."

"I'm so glad."

He looked the part, and then, with a sudden laugh, he
faced about and displayed the damage.

"Here's the evidence, sir. * Your dog did the job
thoroughly. Proof positive!"

Magnal laughed with him, and at him, which was unwise.

"So - I see. * We owe your breeches an apology. *
But people who trespass - ."

Blore was round again, eager and head in air.

"Absolutely. ♣ I wish I could shake paws with your dog."

"Dogs do not always forget."

"Or - forgive? ♣ But I do hope - ."

Magnal made one of those indefinite movements that should suggest to the observant, that the business of the day was waiting for him, and with the swing of his shoulders the sunlight glinted upon the blade of the scythe.

"Staying here?"

The question was curt yet not unfriendly. This man-child seemed a harmless sort of waterfly.

"Just hiking, you know. ♣ But this downland country has a lure. ♣ I am at that farm for a day or two."

"Bareacres?"

"Is that it's name?"

Magnal nodded.

"How utterly right. ♣ Don't you think so, sir?"

Magnal did think so, and also he was thinking that once again Mistover and Lammas had collected yet another entity. But there was no permanence about this butterfly in green and old-gold, a fluttering and impulsive thing that could naively display a young backside. He neither liked nor disliked this ingenuous young man, with his little moustache and his girlish lips. To Magnal Blore did not seem quite male.

The scythe made another significant movement, and its glint gave Blore his cue.

"Not hay time yet, sir, is it?"

"No, ⁴ nettles."

"Nettles?"

"A curious weed that haunts the habitations of men."

Blore looked puzzled. Was this pedantry? If so, he must play up to it.

"You mean, sir - ?"

Magnal was on the move, and Blore turned and walked with him.

"Where man has been - nettles are."

"Like poor relativesnd, sir?"

"Yes, and as importunate. Stinging you to pay attention."

"Do you use a scythe, sir, on such people?"

Magnal gave him a considering glance.

"Know anything about Roman remains?"

"Yes, a little."

"Well, - I have been disintering a Roman villa. Not a sign of a nettle when I began. Now - the damned things want to take possession."

"A Roman villa! ⁴ How thrilling! Where - sir?"

"Up on that hill, ⁴ Greenbury."

"Oh, ⁴ I say, sir, ⁴ might I come and look?"

"I dare say you can."

This young man might be very full of manners and engaging enthusiasms, but on this Spring day Magnal saw nothing but a pair of sloppy trousers and a green shirt. He might tolerate the child, even enjoy a morning with him, and share with him the slopes of Greenbury and the relics of old Rome. In fact, ~~Modred~~ Magnal was amused by the lad, for that is how he thought of him, as a rather pleasant young fool, something of a poser, but without any sinister significance.

"What's your job?"

"Mine, sir?"

"Yes."

Almost Blore looked coy.

"Oh, - I scribble a bit."

"Verse?"

"Yes."

"Published anything?"

"One or two - small efforts. ¶ Don't suppose you have ever read ¶ me. My name's Blore, Hubert Blore."

They were climbing the grass track above Witch's Wood, and to Magnal Witch's Wood was Joanna, but he did not associate Joanna with this youngster.

"No, I'm afraid I haven't. ¶ But that is of no significance. I'm not exactly ¶ contemporary."

"No, sir, you are the sage with the soythe."

Magnal gave him a sudden, oblique look. Father Time? No, such subtle irony need not be inferred.

So, they came to Roman House, and Magnal found that Hubert Blore had some knowledge of the subject, and a very lively appreciation of the ~~mysterious~~ atmosphere of such a place.

"I say, sir, what fun! " And more than fun, if you know what I mean."

His enthusiasm spread itself over the site. He became the romantic, and Magnal the father and guide. Almost, he gloated over the mosaics, and when shown specimens of Roman^o-British glass, handled the exhibits with reverence and tenderness. Had Magnal explored the furnace and the hypocaust chamber? No, not yet.

"I'd love to crawl in there, sir. " You never know what you might find."

Magnal did not tell him of the dead buried in the disused chalkpit, for this enthusiastic babbler might let the secret out.

"And you have done the whole job yourself, sir?"

"Good exercise."

"Herculean stuff! " I suppose you wouldn't take me on as a labourer for a week? " One gets so flabby in London."

Magnal's face had been carrying an expression of tolerant amusement, but suddenly it became set and serious. Did such a prospect pose him? It did. ♡ Here was youth, and there - down yonder, was Joanna. And Blore, watching Magnal's face, read that which Magnal did not suspect that he was revealing.

So, ♡ the old man was jealous!

~~Blore~~
He side-stepped the issue. You needed to walk delicately with a jealous and bearded Jehovah. Hubert Blore appeared to forget his impulsive offer in a sudden lyrical appreciation of the view.

He stood at gaze, innocent and dreamy.

"What a landscape! ♡ Those old fellows did know where to build. ♡ I can understand your liking to be alone here. ♡ Just hills and sky, and no vile humanity. Yes, London's so like dirty blotting-paper."

Magnal was turning up his sleeves and preparing to use his scythe.

"Come along again, some time, ♡ if you care to before you leave."

It was a dismissal, and Blore accepted it like a nice and well mannered boy, but he went down into the valley with his tongue in his cheek, and other cheekiness taking shape.

XXV.

Magnal swung his scythe, and though he was no expert with this tool, nettles are easy victims, especially when young and succulent. Yet any old countryman could have told ~~Modred~~ Magnal that he was wasting his labour, and that nothing but a digging-fork and the human hand could eradicate the pestilent weed. And, after all, why fuss about them? The blade crunched through the sappy stalks, and into Magnal's consciousness certain elementary sayings jumped like grimacing goblins. A "Youth goes to youth." A "Grasp your nettle." A "He who hesitates is lost." Damn these infernal tags of platitudinous wisdom! He let the heel of the scythe rest among the weeds, and leaning upon the handle, he looked out and down upon his world. There, in the distance went that little figure that was youth, Mr. Hubert Blore following the Mistbourne on his way to Bareacres, and yonder, the thatch of Lammas caught the sunlight in the midst of the ^{er} flowing thorns. There too was youth, ^{he} ~~ag~~quisite and tantalising and enigmatic, Joanna of the sloes eyes and smoky hair.

Then there came to Modred Magnal one of those moments of illimation when a man becomes somehow better than himself, and sees life not as a mere business of the body. He stood wide-eyed, conscious of this lovely world and of the ultimate

significance that it may hold for a creature that is endowed with vision. Was he not better than a surly, jealous Jehovah, a grim and grudging old man posed on a high hill and cursing - like some of his prophets - youth and the frailties of the flesh, which might be no more than flesh in its flowering. Did he believe that man was both less and more than the dust, and that life was more than a sardonic joke? Somehow, and deep down in him he did.

Well, - what of it? Had the Infinite Wisdom been playing a game with him, persuading him to essay the part of the celebrate and the philosopher, and then, with ironic suddenness, confronting him with the temptation that had seduced old Adam? It might be so. And was he to fall to it, grudge youth its chances, behave like some miserly old man, without compassion or magnanimity? If - indeed - he loved Joanna, just how did he love her? Had he not the courage to put his manhood to the test?

Miss Allison was laying the table for Magnal's lunch when she saw him enter the gate with the scythe over his shoulder. He paused to lean the scythe against the wall, and then he stood a moment, looking at the old house with a peculiar steadfastness, not as though he was examining the outer texture of it, but as though he saw it as a live thing with a soul. Miss Allison stood holding the cheese dish in

one hand, the bread knife in the other, and Miss Allison knew that she had been tempted of the Devil.

"I'll tell him."

So, the fate of all four of them hung for a moment on the edge of a woman's conscience, but Elizabeth Allison's confession was to be taken from her lips.

She had her back to the door when he entered, and he saw her bending over the table and doing something to the tulips in the vase. Her lips moved, but silently so, as though she was trying the words over to herself.

"Oh, ♪ Elizabeth."

"Yes, sir."

"I met last night's visitor ♪ this morning. He came to apologise for getting his trousers torn."

Miss Allison went rigid, and her hand was a palsied hand amid the flowers.

"Who was it?"

"Oh, a youngster who is staying at Bareacres. ♪ Being a poet he was cultivating mystery and moonlight. ♪ He wants to apologise to Bob."

Miss Allison withdrew her hand from the flowers, but she kept her back turned to Magnal.

"I'm glad it wasn't - ."

"No, quite a nice lad. ♪ He went up to Greenbury with

me this morning, and I showed him - the work."

"Did you, sir. 4 I suppose he was surprised to find - ?"

"He was, 4 Elizabeth."

"He had never been there before?"

"Oh, 4 years ago, it seems. Offered to volunteer for casual labour. 4 I'm asking him to dinner."

Miss Allison drew a deep breath and held it. She straightened something on the table that did not need attention.

"Very good, 4 Mr. Magnal. When will it be?"

"Tonight, perhaps. I'll stroll over to Bäreacres and ask him. Can you manage?"

"Of course, sir."

Magnal sat down to his lunch with the air of one who had put some bothersome business behind him and could give free play to a healthy hunger, and Miss Allison, having served him, sat down to her own dinner. Joanna had been responsible for the staff-table and Joanna had forgotten the forks for the meat course.

"Forks, 4 Joanna."

Joanna jumped up to get them. She neither said that she was sorry nor that it had been silly of her to forget. Miss Allison had a thoughtful face, and was remembering the wisdom of Solomon.

"There is to be a visitor tonight."

Joanna did not appear interested, although a guest at Lammas was as rare as the dodo.

"Oh!"

Miss Allison kept her eyes on her plate.

"Yes, our moonlight visitor - who hurt poor Bob."

Miss Allison was trailing her lure, for, was it not better that she should know whether romance was in the air.

"What a funny thing. Who was it?"

"A young man who is staying at Bareacres."

Joanna was silent. - The fingers of her left hand were crumbling bread, and her eyes were staring at the old fashioned cruet stand. Miss Allison waited, but the silence continued, and Miss Allison's eyes lifted to Joanna's face. Something was the matter with Joanna, and Miss Allison's attention returned to her plate. Joanna knew; Joanna was hiding something. So, of the four of them three were wise, and the fourth - was just Modred Magnal, a man with grey in his hair.

Magnal strolled over the downs to Bareacres, and saw John Wise's lambs at play on the slopes above Ash Wood. Old Lavender, the shepherd, was sitting by his white hut on its iron wheels, his dog at his side, an empty pipe in his mouth, and all about him the grass was pied with flowers. Magnal diverged to speak to the shepherd, for, maybe his mood was

coloured by this picture, and Tom Lavender was a good person to swap words with on this experimental day.

"No fool like an old fool," said the inward voice.

"Grasp your nettle. Do you fear youth? Then - dare to give youth its day."

How was Magnal to foresee that magnanimity may cause more pain and travail than meanness? Some of the ewes gazed at him suspiciously and called to their young. Tom's dog got up and let out a challenging bark. Two lambs were butting each other. Old Tom sat still, sucking his empty pipe.

"Well, Tom, your lambs must be liking the weather."

"They be, sir."

Magnal bent down to pat the dog, and then took to the turf beside the shepherd. He had his pouch with him, and he produced it and passed it to the old man.

"Fill up, ~~W~~ Tom."

"Thank 'ee, sir."

When the shepherd had filled his pipe, Magnal did likewise, and they sat and smoked and watched the lambs at play. Tom Lavender was not a man of many words; having lived so much with his sheep, his conversation could consist of animal noises, grunts of varying volume and intensity, and sudden monosyllabic blurtings, a language which his dog understood.

"Good mutton in the making, Tom. ♪ How long do those youngsters keep up their romping?"

"Not for long, sir."

"I always wonder when lamb becomes mutton. ♪ Do you eat much mutton, Tom?"

The shepherd considered that question. Was it a frivolous question? To Tom his sheep were the serious business of life. He pulled steadily at his pipe, and his old eyes were serene.

"No, ♪ I don't, sir. Haven't touched mutton for nigh on twenty years. I eats pork, when I do eat butcher's meat. I don't have nothing to do with pigs."

So, Tom was fastidious and would have felt rather like a cannibal had he made his Sunday dinner on mutton. It was possible that these live creatures never died for Tom Lavender and that he would not let himself think of the shambles.

"You're soft-hearted about sheep, Tom."

"I be that, sir."

"And lambs must have their play. That's - wisdom."

Tom grunted. Being wise in his own way he did not speak much of wisdom.

Magnal left the old man serenely set upon the green hillside, and passed on towards Bareacres. Tom might be thinking

of the washing and the shearing, and the baling of his flock's wool, and of his plate of pork on Sundays, but the slaughter-house did not come within his ken. Maybe he trudged as far as the market, and then closed his old eyes to the subsequent shambles. And was that wisdom, to let lambs play and refuse to see them as meat in a butcher's shop?

So, Magnal came to Bareacres, a Quixote with grey in his beard, and a wilful and magnaminous challenge to life in his heart. He found Mrs. Wise unpegging some of her washing in the front garden, and among the exhibits was an apple green shirt. That garment was not John Wise. ♣ So, youth did carry a clean shirt in its pack.

"Good afternoon, Mrs. Wise. ♣ Is Mr. Blore anywhere about?"

"Good afternoon, sir. ♣ I did see him go into the orchard a little while back."

"Perhaps I shall find him there."

"You may, sir."

Hubert Blore was lying flat on his back under an ancient summerling apple whose flower petals were beginning to fall from branches that were grey with lichen. His eyes were closed, and he appeared to be asleep. Some of the flower

petals had settled upon his trousers and his shirt, and the colour of his shirt was bright blue, a vivid splash upon the young herbage. Ladies Laces and ox-eyed daisy were coming into flower, and the sky was very blue above that upland, wind-blown orchard.

Blore was not asleep, but enjoying a concupiscent day-dream. He had a girl with him in the grasses, a dark girl, passionate and slim, eager for the love-struggle, Joanna of Roman House. The coarse turf muffled Magnal's footsteps, and for a heavy man he was very light of foot. He paused and looked down at this sleeping Narcissus, and somehow saw him differently from the young man of the morning. Hubert Blore, with his eyes shut, was even more suggestive of a goat, and his ruffled up hair made his head look like the head of a faun.

The dreamer made a sudden movement as though to roll over on his face, and Magnal spoke.

"I seem to have caught you napping."

Blore's body came erect with one swift movement, arms tense, hands half hidden in the grass. His upward glance was angry. Eros should not be surprised like this.

"Oh, it's you, sir!"

His face glibbed itself into a smile. He ran a hand

over his hair, as though other dishevelled thoughts needed smoothing.

"Farmhouse dinners are narcotic, sir."

Magnal was conscious of sudden hesitation, of a vague smeariness on the face of youth. For one moment he was almost persuaded to withhold that invitation, and the impulse was wiser than he knew.

Blore got on his feet. He seemed to be shy of the other man's eyes. He yawned, ~~h~~ stretched himself, gave a toss of the head.

"Any idea of the time, sir?"

"About four oclock."

"Can I give you tea?"

Magnal was frowning to himself. Why this vacillation? Was he afraid of this thing in sloppy trousers?

"Thanks, Blore, but I have jobs to do. ~~W~~ I strolled over to ask you to dine with me and meet the dog."

Blore's eyes seemed to narrow. ~~h~~ ^{en} Thus, he became the ingenuous, impulsive boy.

"Awfully decent and chic of you, sir. I'd love to."

"Good. Say seven fifteen. I'll show you some of my treasures."

"I'm afraid I've got no war paint."

"Don't worry. Lammas isn't the Cafe du Paris."

Blore strolled with him as far as the farm gate, and there they parted for a while, and the young man's smile might have been amplified by a secret snigger. Treasures, what! Would the Old Man produce that particular treasure?

XXVI. .

Miss Allison was troubled, partly so because she was unhappy with herself. Why was her great man doing this strange thing, tempting youth with youth? She had held her tongue when she felt that she should have spoken; she had been tempted and she had fallen, and so failed the friend who had given back life to her. How these primitive emotions did devastate your rational and loyal self! - But might not Magnal be wiser than she knew, wise in making a generous and care-free gesture? And after all, this young man was a mere passing stranger, a face that had drifted to a window, and which would disappear as casually as it had come.

She had not liked that face at the window, and he had lied to Magnal about Greenbury.

She, the high-priestess of the Lammas household was to prepare the feast, and she would have shirked it. But was she not imagining things, behaving like a fussy fool? "Have some sense, Elizabeth. If he, in the kindness of his heart, chooses to ask a lonely lad to dinner, why get agitated?" Miss Allison took herself in hand. She would give them soup, brazed ham and spinach, open a bottle of cherries, and finish with a savoury.

"Joanna, my dear."

"Yes, Aunt Bess?"

"Get me a bottle of cherries out of the store-cupboard,

and a tin of sardines."

"Yes, Aunt Bess."

Joanna was in her working frock, and Miss Allison wondered about that frock. Would the girl change it? There might be an esoteric significance in the changing of a frock. But, Miss Allison wanted to be alone for a little while, and she slipped out of the house and along the green way to the chapel. The smell of the mayflower was with her, and how poignant some scents could be! May-blossom, the spring of the year, youth, youth in an aging body, a young heart and a white head. Did the young ever understand how young the old could be?

Miss Allison knelt for five minutes in the chapel, and came forth calmed and comforted. She saw the sunlight on the hills and was glad of their great green finality. Hills did not change, though their weather-moods might vary, nor was Lammas a little Jericho to drop its walls when youth blew a cheeky trumpet. Yes, surely she had been imagining things, and had stumbled over the rocks of her own too sensitive conscience.

So, to work, with Joanna's hands to help her. She came in to find both sittingroom and kitchen empty. Where was the girl? Had she gone up to change that frock? Miss Allison was not a woman to shout up the stairs. She climbed them

and knocked at Joanna's door.

"Joanna."

There was no answer, and Miss Allison opened the door. The room was empty.

Miss Allison stood wide-eyed, with her hand to her cheek, gazing at Joanna's bed with its pretty flowery quilt. How fatal to her poor dream had been the ^{coming} ~~earring~~ of this child, and yet, but for the thorn in the flesh, they might have been so happy together. Miss Allison closed the door, and descended the stairs. Had Joanna gone out with Magnal, or had she flown to meet youth, a secret lover? But why secret? Miss Allison paused; and like someone overcome with sudden weariness, she leaned against the wall. Oh, these emotions! Might not the solution of it all be so simple, both for youth and for her? She had but to play the part of the silent watcher, let youth merge with youth, as it should do, hail the conventional romance, and find the old house becoming once more her own. Had she not given years of devoted service to Lammas, made it her house as well as his, planned and laboured for his peace and comfort? It was reasonable and right that Joanna should love some lad, and join hands with him. Why interfere, why feel responsible, why worry?

But where was Joanna? The parlour door was open, the library door closed. Miss Allison looked into the parlour

and found it empty. She knocked gently at the library door.

"Yes."

She opened the door, and saw Magnal sitting at his desk.

"About wine, sir? Would you - ?"

"A bottle of Burgundy, I think, Elizabeth."

"Very good, sir."

The grandfather clock struck six as Miss Allison entered the kitchen. She had her work to do, and she set about it, after carefully washing her hands, for she was meticulous in her cleanliness. She prepared spinach and cut the slices of ham, opened the bottle of black cherries, whipped up an egg custard, and cut bread to be toasted for her savoury. The Burgundy would need warming, and she brought up a bottle from the cellar and placed it beside the kitchen range. Claret glasses, yes, the purple glasses, and both the wine and the glasses seemed to her to be too good for the young man whose face she had seen at the window. While she worked she listened for other footsteps. Where was Joanna? Had the girl gone to meet a lover, or had one of those strange sex-panics seized her?

Elizabeth Allison went in to lay the table. She loved preparing this gracious table with its top of sleek and polished oak. The table was like a mirror reflecting the silver and the china, and its bowl of flowers. She heard

the library door open, and saw Magnal and the dog in the garden. Magnal was hatless and wearing the black velvet jacket he put on for the evening meal. Somehow it made him look older. She watched him walk to the gate, and disappear down the green way, followed by the dog. Had he gone to meet his visitor? If so - . Yes, where was Joanna?

The clock ticked on. Miss Allison was brazing her ham when she heard voices, men's voices. Magnal and his guest were in the passage. She heard Magnal say -

"Like to look at some of my treasures before dinner?"

"I'd love to, sir. What sort of wine did the Romans drink in Britain?"

"Wine from Gaul and Spain."

"Red cheeked wine, black eyed wine."

"Yes" said Magnal, "if that is your fancy."

Hubert Blore drank a Dubonnet before dinner, Magnal plain Italian Vermouth, and Hubert Blore, having dabbled his hands in Roman mysteries, began to wonder about that live treasure. In exploring Magnal's simply marvellous old domain the young man's eyes had been here, there, and everywhere, the eyes of an eager goat, and while listening politely to his host, his little smudge of a moustache had covered a

mordant suspicion. Where was the petticoat? Had the Old Man played a trick on him and locked Venus up in a cupboard?

They were in the garden, and Blore held his glass up to the light.

"Colour, sir, ^a what colour!"

"The wine-red sea of the Greeks!"

"Crete, sir, and Delos, and Myc^aene. ~~A~~ I gather you have a nice taste in wine and glass," and his inward impudence added "and women."

"I have a liking for things - old."

"I - too, sir," and his giggle was ingenuous, ^a "but not in - lovelies."

Magnal looked at the sky.

"I will not advertise my ignorance."

Miss Allison appeared in the porch, straight and austere.

"Dinner is served, sir."

Hubert Blore jerked a sidelong glance at her. Gosh, the old woman who had caught him at the window! Would she recognise him, and would she blab, and did it matter?

"Thank you, Elizabeth."

They dined, and Miss Allison stood to serve and Magnal seemed bothered about something. It did not appear right and proper that Elizabeth Allison should wait upon this bard in a blue shirt. And if not Elizabeth, ^a then who? ^a Joanna?

No. *W* But where was Joanna?

"We can look after ourselves, Elizabeth."

"Very good, sir. I have warmed the wine."

Hubert Blore too grew warm with wine. Like most of the ^{abedol} young he had no palate, but he responded to the kick of it, and the cruder the kick - the better.

"What lovely stuff, sir."

The Old Man appeared to be a little distraught, and it was Blore who carried the conversation. He became pert and politely garrulous, for the wine had taken some of the ^Ucunning edge from his glibness, and Magnal kept passing him the decanter. Miss Allison, preparing coffee in the kitchen, and listening for the return of Joanna, could hear the young man's voice growing somewhat shrill, and breaking into splurges of laughter. He was becoming a little too familiar.

"Do you stay here all the year, sir?"

"I do."

"How marvellous of you! *W* But, I suppose, that when one gets - "

He hesitated, for Magnal was looking at him in a peculiar way.

"Philosophy, and - ."

"Grey hairs," said Magnal, suddenly.

"Well, yes, sir, *W* but *W* a sage spirit."

Magnal smiled in his beard.

"There are - compensations."

"Of course, one isn't torn to shreds by sex and all that."

Magnal twirled his glass, and glanced out of the window, and so happened to see something that Blore had missed.

"Shall we take coffee outside?" and he touched the table-bell.

Miss Allison went to answer it. Hubert Blore was looking flushed.

"Elizabeth, we will take our coffee in the garden."

"Very good, sir."

"Is the chapel locked?"

"I think it is, sir."

"Would you mind bringing me the key."

Miss Allison went for the key, and returning, stood stiffly just inside the door.

"Someone has taken the key, sir."

Magnal looked at her sharply.

"Well then - don't trouble."

They sat in two deck chairs with a garden table between them, and Magnal poured out the coffee.

"Black or white, Blore?"

"Black, sir."

"Sugar?"

"Three lumps, sir. ^{me} I'm afraid I'm a saccharic soul."

Magnal was beginning to feel bored by the young man. He talked as though Modred Magnal was a hundred years old and had not seen the lights of London since the days of his youth. Even his glib politeness was like his sugared coffee, far too sweet, and somehow an offence, and the "Sir" seemed slimed with a suggestion of patronage. Did women fall for creatures like this, over-animated and neurotic young exhibitionists who reduced modesty to the size of a fig-leaf? Blore's boyishness became less than a veneer as the wine warmed his sallow skin. Magnal lit a pipe, Blore a cigarette, one of his own brand, and it was scented.

"I ought to apologise to the may-blossom, sir."

"I shouldn't. Nature never apologises."

"I say - that's quite - profound. ^W One might expect to knock up against old Merlin in a place like this."

"And the chapel of the Holy Grail. ^W We have such a chapel."

"How - woozy, sir! All briar rose and ^{a old Joseph of Aramthea} Dante ly?"

"Almost. ^W Care to see it."

"Love to. - But I thought the old dame said the key was missing."

Magnal gave him a scathing look.

"It may be in the door. - Suppose we stroll."

"By the way, sir, I haven't seen the dear doggie."

"I shut him up," said Magnal with secret meaning, "dogs are apt to remember."

Blore was on his feet, and playfully wagging his posterior.

"Can't risk a second hiatus, sir."

"No," thought Magnal, "but what you need is for someone to dust your trousers."

He walked behind Blore to the gate. The lad had the hips of a girl, and almost he walked like one with fat little thighs rolling against each other, and Magnal was feeling sardonic. Youth should meet youth and sample it, and so, in his unwise wisdom he marched on to display this poetaster to Joanna. No one should say that he was afraid of a thing like Blore, or too ungenerous in his gestures, and yet how little he knew of the vagaries of sex, and the whimsies of a woman.

Magnal opened the gate of the curtilage. He could see that the chapel door was open.

"Here we are. ♪ Early English - as you see."

They walked side by side up the path, and Magnal, looking in, saw that which he had expected to see, a girl's figure kneeling by the altar. He paused, with a sudden peculiar smile, and a glance at Blore.

"Hullo, M I'm afraid we - ."

He saw Joanna rise and turn to face them. She came slowly down the chapel to the door, moving ~~about~~ like a sleep-walker. She looked at neither of them, but through the open doorway to the flowering thorns.

"Oh, A Joanna, this is Mr. Hubert Blore. ~~My~~ Mr. Blore, this is my - secretary."

Joanna stood still, rigid, voiceless. There was a little smirk on Blore's face. Would she play up, and keep the old man guessing?

"Delighted, ~~A~~ Miss Joanna."

Magnal turned away.

"Show Mr. Blore the chapel, Joanna. ~~A~~ I have a letter to write."

Joanna's eyes were wide open. She looked at him in an almost tragic way, like a child deserted by the friend who should have understood her. Why was he leaving her alone with this young man? Was it that he did not care, or did he wish her - ? Was he too old to feel that which she felt or might feel, too old to divine those elemental things that can both tempt and frighten? She saw him give them an almost playful wave of the hand, and walk down to the gate as though he had willed this wilful desertion.

Blore was watching her with a little snicker of a smile.

He produced his cigarette case.

"Thanks, lovely, for not giving me away. ♡ Have one?"

She glanced at his case, and shook her head.

• "No, ♡ not here."

"But we're not staying here. Let's go and smell the mayflower. The old man seems to be obliging."

She winced.

"I'd rather go back. ♡ I - "

"Have a heart. ♡ We're young, not like those other two. Old man Magnal is just soused in Roman remains. Come on, let's stroll."

He put an arm round her.

Miss Allison, clearing the table, happened to look out of the window, to see Magnal coming in alone. She stood very still, holding the empty wine bottle, like some symbol clasped between her breasts. Had he found Joanna? Had he - ?

Magnal came to the window and looked in.

"Oh, ♡ there you are, Elizabeth. ♡ We found Joanna. I've left the young things alone together for half an hour."

He appeared almost head-in-air about it, like some reckless, self-sure boy. Miss Allison's lips moved, but no sound came from them, though a secret voice spoke to him and to

herself.

"You fool, [^] you dear fool! [^] Oh, God forgive me -
for not speaking!"

XXVII.

Magnal's half an hour became an hour, and began to blend with the sunset.

He had sat down with his pipe and his pen, feeling a rather shrewd and magnanimous fellow, but when the half hour had gone he began to grow restless. He looked at his watch; he looked out of the window; he listened. It was time for Master Blore to remember his host and his manners.

Had he been quite fair to Joanna?

Damn it, that lad was trespassing too much upon time and tolerance!

Well, & he might - . Good God, was he growing jealous? He sat for another five minutes, confronting those unpleasant and primitive disharmonies, trying to assume a paternal serenity. It would not do. He left his chair and went out into the garden and listened for voices, and the only voice he heard was that of a blackbird. There was a strange poignancy in the bird's song. ~~it seemed to vibrate in his very vitals.~~

Damn it, & where was that young fellow-my-lad?

He opened the gate and strolled up the green way to the chapel, with the bird's song haunting him. The chapel door was open, its interior dark and empty, and Magnal stood a moment like a man savouring some unpleasant odour. Then,

he closed and locked the door, and returned to Lammas. The sky was splendid above the thatch, and somehow its splendour mocked him.

He went in, looked into the parlour, hesitated, and then walked down the passage to the kitchen.

"Elizabeth."

Her voice answered him, but she was not visible.

"Yes, sir?"

"Joanna back yet?"

"No."

"I had better go out and find her."

Miss Allison was sitting upright in a chair, staring straight in front of her. She heard Magnal's footsteps go down the passage. She started to her feet, stood gripped in the stillness of an inward struggle, sat down again. What would be - would be.

Magnal walked down the green way towards the open country, and the last glow of the sunset lay upon it. He shaded his eyes with a hand, but no human figure was visible. A slow anger was growing in him, nor did he realise that this second sally in search of youth had a different tempo, and that it was not the philosopher and friend who had wandered out to find a young man and a girl. Where were those two? Down by the Mistbourne? And then he saw something. He

himself was still in the shadow of the thorns, and as he stared across the open grassland towards the Long Barrow he saw a little black object rise above the dark line of the long mound, a human head. For a second or so it remained there, and then it disappeared.

Magnal's anger grew. So, young Blore had taken Joanna down to the Long Barrow, and it was Blore's head that he had seen, scanning the open country for a possible intervention. Magnal's fists were clenched in his trouser pockets. With the afterglow upon his face he went loping down towards the Long Barrow, an almost primitive figure, ominous and fierce. It was the prow of the hunting beast. The soft turf deadened all sound, but if he could hear voices, youth did not hear his footsteps.

He came to the great black bank and stood still.

"I must go - now."

"Tut-tut, my sweet. *Why hurry?* Just another - ."

"I must. - They'll wonder - ."

"The old man's stuck in his chair ~~in~~ with his pipe. *h*
What's he - to us - in the lovely twilight?"

"Please, *h* let me - ."

Have a heart,
"One more, my sweet - ."

~~In the silence there were sounds as of two young things
struggling together.~~

Magnal went cold, cold as death. The anger in him was drenched with shame. Was he to be caught here like some snooping lout, and made to feel a fool, an old fool to be laughed at by the young? He flung round and went back in a furious haste, savagely eager to escape that last humiliation. Perhaps, for the moment, he was more savage against himself than against those two. They were young - . God, what a fool part he had played! The ass ~~had~~ ^{had} most certainly the laugh of Balaam. When he was within fifty yards of the thorns he turned and looked back. Had he been seen? He had not. The two young things were still ~~at the love game~~ on the other side of the Long Barrow. He was conscious of relief, and of a sudden resurgent anger. Damn it, ~~4~~ were they still there? And Joanna, in spite of her protests, had been persuaded, & . Did things happen so quickly? Was a girl just tinder to the spark of a lad like Blore? It seemed incredible, indecent. He swung on towards the shelter of the thorns. He scourged himself with self-derision. "You fool, you bloody old fool!"

Reaching cover he faced about and stood at gaze. The fading afterglow outlined the barrow, and he saw two figures rise into the light. They remained poised there for a moment, silhouetted. Then they seemed to merge. They were holding hands, and so linked they ran together down the steep slope.

Magnal faced about with a cold emptiness in his belly. This was youth, playful and passionate, running hand in hand through the twilight.

He turned quickly into the shadow of the thorns, and in this twilight his anger seemed to fade into sudden shame and self-accusation. What quarrel had he with youth? Might not that which appeared repulsive and shocking to him be beautiful to those two? This sex-rage of his was just hypocrisy. He was no better than a jealous old Jehovah, envying Adam and Eve the prerogatives of the flesh. ~~inwardly~~ ~~he smote himself.~~

"Hypocrite and damned old fool!"

When Blore sauntered in at the garden gate he found his host sitting alone in the dusk, with a faint glow showing from the bowl of his pipe.

"I'm awfully sorry, sir. My Joanna wanted to show me the Long Barrow, and we started talking."

"That's all right," said Magnal quietly.

"Thanks for being so sporty. Joanna seems to know a terrible lot about these old places."

He took the other chair, and in the dusk his pale face looked smooth and glib.

"Joanna in?"

"Yes. ¶ She went in the other way, said she ought to be helping the dame."

Magnal bit hard on his pipe.

"So ¶ Joanna gave you a lecture."

"She did, sir. Made me feel - ."

"Quite the boy at school."

Blore lit a cigarette and the flame of the match played upon his moustache and his soft, full lips, and Magnal, having glanced at him, looked elsewhere.

"Would you mind very much, sir, ¶ if Joanna showed me round the dear old eternal hills? ¶ I don't want to bother you."

Magnal smoked for some seconds in silence.

"Have I any right to mind?"

"Oh, ¶ well, sir, you're a kind of benignant god-father.

And - "

"One moment, Mr. Blore, Joanna is very young. I take it that you - ."

Blore gave a little ingenuous laugh.

"Oh, sir, ¶ I'm a harmless sort of idiot. ¶ I've no tricks. No Juan - this, ¶ Mr. Magnal."

Magnal felt cold, and the anger was dead in him. What right had he to be angry even though he knew the young man to be lying? Could he expect youth to be candid with him

when philandering was in the air? Was he himself so innocent, so sexless? And, after all, did not young things flirt, and Mr. Hubert Blore was not a permanency. He would flutter away like a colourful and vapid butterfly over the hills.

Yet there was a streak of malice in Magnal.

"I might manage to spare the time - to show you round."

Blore was Agag.

"Most awfully chic of you, sir, ♣ but I should feel I was - really - trespassing ♠ this time."

"Well, my lad, ♣ I think the decision rests with Miss Foster."

"Oh, quite so, sir."

"If Miss Allison can spare her. ♣ You see, we all work here."

"But can you spare her, sir? ♣ I feel I've got a book in this country. - Such atmosphere."

"And a pretty girl is part of the decoy^u, Mr. Blore."

The young man laughed.

"You are a most understanding person, sir. Poetry and petticoats go together. I'm just being lyrical, you know, the harmless poppinjay."

What a glib young gentleman it was, but would it be wise to pull the feathers from him? Compassion might add colour to the romance.

Miss Allison sat watching the darkness fall in the orchard outside the window. The sky was steel grey, and the grasses and the leaves had lost their greenness. The trunks of the trees were very black. Birds had been singing, but now a silence had fallen upon the earth. Miss Allison watched and listened, for, out of this silence some sound would come like the whispering of aspen leaves even when no wind is moving, and presently she heard the sound for which she had waited, quick feverish footsteps, but they came by way of the orchard from a swing-gate in the green way. Miss Allison saw a dim figure drift past the window, with a significant stealth. A door opened furtively. The footsteps went up the stairs into the room above. Then there was silence.

Miss Allison sat very still, and the same stillness continued in the room above. What did it mean? Miss Allison could picture a girl sitting on a bed, gripped by the strange young ecstasy of the moment. Or was it fear, or sudden, shame, or the bewilderment of knowledge? Eve and the apple!

Magnal went to the gate with Hubert Blore, because it seemed to him that if you had cast yourself for the part of gentleman and friend no courtesy should be spared. He was to remember that glib little face looking up at him in the darkness and the cozening voice impertinently polite under

the smudge of hair on the upper lip.

"Thanks for a most marvellous evening, sir. † May I come along tomorrow and apply for a conducted tour?"

Magnal's big hands were on the gate, hands whose natural urge was to lay themselves upon this patterer and rend him.

"You may. ♡ It will rest with Miss Foster."

"Oh, quite so, sir, if the dear old dame can spare her. Mighty - night, sir. If I'm not slick I may get locked out."

He turned away and walked off into the night and Magnal heard the faint squeaking of his corduroy bags as his fat thighs rubbed against each other. What a provoking little dollop! Yet, Magnal, in his savagery against himself, was fiercely moved to allow every dog and every dollop his day. Let youth savour youth and make its choice. Was he to compete with this Bloomsbury cockatoo? He stood for a while at the gate, somewhat too proud of his selfish tolerance, and of a sacrificial sanity that could show consideration even to a cad.

As Magnal walked up the path it came to him that the house was in darkness, the windows dead, the porch door a panel of gloom. What had become of Elizabeth and her punctilious routine? And where was Joanna? He entered, and closing the porch door, he groped for the wall-switch and pressed it down, for Lammas now had its own electric light.

He stood listening, and heard no sound save the ticking of the old clock. Had the whole house gone to sleep?

"Elizabeth."

Miss Allison rose from her chair in the dark room.

"Yes, sir."

She heard his footsteps in the passage, and moving quickly to the doorway she switched on the light.

"Joanna in?"

"Yes, she's gone upstairs, sir."

Her eyes rested for a moment on his face. How serious he looked.

"Good. I wondered whether everybody had gone to bed. That was an excellent dinner, Elizabeth."

"Thank you, sir."

"I think our young friend enjoyed it."

There was a pause. He stood as though deep in thought, faced about, walked a few steps, and hesitated.

"Oh, Elizabeth, can you spare Joanna tomorrow?"

"For the whole day?"

"No, part of it. She and Mr. Blore are going out."

Miss Allison appeared to consider the suggestion.

"Of course I can, sir, - but - ."

"What's troubling you, Elizabeth?"

"Oh, nothing, sir. I can manage."

Almost she had blurted out those words of warning. "Is it wise?" But her lips closed, pressing themselves together, and her hands were interlocked. Let nature have its way. Was she Joanna's keeper?

Breakfast was over. Magnal was at his desk, pipe in mouth, pen in hand, and on the page of his day book he had written those words of old Lander's.

"I strove with none, for none were worthy of my strife,
I warmed both hands before the fire of life."

He rose, crossed the room, rang the bell, and returned quickly to his chair.

Now, the ringing of a bell was rare in Lammass, and Miss Allison and Joanna looked at each other, but only for a moment, for Joanna's eyes slid swiftly away.

"Shall I go, Aunt Bess?"

"No, & I will go."

Miss Allison, with a face that had shaped itself to the strange silences and disquietudes of the morning meal, walked with austere deliberation to the library door. She knocked.

"Come in. † Oh, it's you, Elizabeth. † Will you tell Joanna I want to speak to her."

"Very good, sir."

Miss Allison returned to the kitchen.

"The master wants you in the library."

She saw Joanna's face go ^{flushed} ~~pricked~~ and pale with fear.

Then Miss Allison did a thing which for ever afterwards shamed her. She heard Magnal say "Shut the door, Joanna." Miss Allison glided down the passage to listen.

Joanna stood just inside the door, her hands behind her, her black eyes fixed on the man at the desk. What would he have to say to her? Was he angry? Was he blind to the kind of madness that might intoxicate youth in the Spring of the year, when he - had failed to savour that which might have been his? He did not care, or care as she had dreamed of his caring. Almost, it seemed to her that he had thrust her upon this other man. And there were in this girl profundities of passion and of protest which Modred Magnal had not divined. Was it that he was too old, too stuck in his chair, or was it that she was no more than a servant?

"Joanna."

She waited in silence, trembling. If he scolded her all might be well. It was emotion that she asked for, even angry emotion, something that might show her that he was man, and not the impartial and aloof creature whom that other and younger man could mock at.

He turned and looked at her, and his face seemed coldly kind.

"Mr. Blore is coming today. He wants to see the

pit-dwellings on Dead Man's Down, and the disc barrows beyond Greenbury. "I'm rather busy. Will you take him in hand, Joanna."

She stood very still, gazing fixedly at Magnal. For a moment she was moved to run to him, throw herself on her knees, plead. "Oh, don't send me with him. Don't you understand?" But he looked so cold, so kind, so enigmatically the master, so far away, so immoveable.

"Yes, Mr. Magnal."

"Thank you, Joanna."

And he turned again to his desk.

He did not see her little pale face flush, and the dark eyes light up with sparkles of anger. Joanna's head went up, and her throat showed white; a sudden recklessness possessed her. If he cared so little, why should she care?

XXVIII.

It seemed to Elizabeth Allison that ^{during these} ~~on this~~ fatal day Magnal did everything that was wrong. Had he, stubbornly and of set purpose, planned to throw youth into the arms of youth, he could not have acted more mulishly. That, at the age of forty nine a man could be ravaged by the savagery of sex, and in raging against it, behave like some stark Puritan, was - perhaps - beyond her ken, though she too had been martyred by her pride. To her ~~modest~~ Magnal had not appeared as other men, and when he planted his pride in a chariot and drove off with it, she was conscious of a fearful and secret exultation.

"I am going to Blenborough, Elizabeth. Back for dinner tonight."

He did not see Hubert Blore, for he and his car were away beyond Melfont when Blore came whistling and smirking to the gate of Lammas. Magnal believed that he had torn himself away from temptation. He did not realise that he was sacrificing the precious thing he coveted.

"Jo - anna!"

Blore sang her name like some triumphant and crowing young cockerel. If the old man was about, let him hear it. Miss Allison, dusting Magnal's desk, and having read and pondered that combative couplet in his daybook, flicked her

duster out of the window, and with grave grey eyes considered the young man. Blore, hands in trouser pockets, came up the path with casual confidence.

"Morning, ^W Allison. The professor in?"

Allison - indeed! Elizabeth withdrew her duster.

"Mr. Magnal has gone to Blenborough."

"Where's Jo.?"

"I think she is upstairs."

"You might tell her I'm here, ~~Allison~~."

Elizabeth turned her back on him.

He sauntered into the parlour and lit a cigarette, and then wandered out into the passage.

"Jo - anna!"

Did this lad think he owned the place? Miss Allison heard Joanna's footsteps on the stairs, quick, feverish footsteps. Joanna had been putting on a new and flowery frock and ~~black~~ silk stockings. The colour of the frock was saffron. It made her eyes and hair look more black.

"Hallo ^y !"

There was a recklessness about her, a vivid liveness.

"Got the notes of your lecture, ^{lovely} ~~darling~~?"

She made a little mouth at him. - Such endearments might shock Aunt Bess.

"What about a pic-nic lunch?"

"Lovely."

"Aunt Bess, can we take sandwiches?"

Miss Allison's voice answered from the library.

"Yes, if you wish to."

She found them in possession of the kitchen, busy with ham and bread and butter, Joanna using the knife, Blore sitting sideways on the kitchen table. She wanted to say to him "Get off my table.". He smiled at her with insolent and sleepy eyes.

"Don't mind us, Allison."

She ignored him.

"What about the drink, Jo.?"

"Oh, yes, coffee in a thermos."

"Coffee! No, my dear. The professor won't mind us taking a bottle of beer, Allison, will he?"

Miss Allison did not appear to hear him. He got off the table, and went to the door.

"Where's the cellar?"

"Just opposite."

Miss Allison was provoked by this ^eaffrontery. She followed him. She confronted him as he reascended the cellar stairs, and with him a bottle of the master's Burgundy.

"Put that back, please, Mr. Blore."

He grinned at her.

"Oh, ~~h~~ Allison, ~~h~~ why - ."

"Put it back, sir, please. I - am responsible for the wine."

"Well, ~~h~~ you can say - ."

She barred the way.

"Put it back."

He obeyed her.

The month of May was in a melting mood, and as Miss Allison watched from a window and saw them set off she could suspect that Joanna was like the day. Before they reached the gate Hubert Blore had his arm round her, but Elizabeth Allison saw that it was Joanna who carried the basket. What a nasty, conceited little bit of effrontery he was! Sex was a strange thing! Magnal - and that! But, Miss Allison, stroking her cheek, supposed that there was nothing odd about this love affair, and that if these two young things took the conventional path and became engaged and married, the Wedding March would peal out upon yet another problem. And she, she would once more possess this lovely place, and stand alone - unchallenged - to serve him.

Yes, what a perfect day was this! Let youth go its way and rid her of all those secret discords. Miss Allison wandered out into the garden with Bob at her heels, and plucked a posy of Sweet Williams, and with calm devotion

arranged them in an old blue vase upon Magnal's desk. She stood and savoured this comely room with its books and its rich shabbiness and its smell of tobacco. This - indeed - was his place, a man's and a scholar's haven, peaceful and unfretted. ♣ He would forget, ♣ if there was anything serious to forget. An autumnal serenity would return to Lammas, and the sweet raw anguish of the spring would pass. Yes, let Joanna have her lover.

Magnal returned to Lammas just before seven. He put the car away and was met by Bob who came bounding across the yard. Magnal bent down and the dog's wet nose and tongue dabbled his neck and face. These were no Judas kisses, and soothing to that supreme egoist - man.

The table was laid for him, with flowers and fruit. The Sherry decanter and a glass waited upon his will. He poured himself out a glass of the dark brown wine, and held it up to the light. Old wine ♣, old women? He was conscious of Olympian laughter, and the laugh was against himself.

Miss Allison came to the door.

"Shall I serve dinner, sir?"

"Yes, ♣ Elizabeth, ♣ I'm ready."

She had taken infinite care in the planning and preparing of that meal, and all his little whims and fancies were

considered. She served him, and it seemed to her that his face was more serene, his voice the voice of the ~~Modered~~ Magnal whom she knew.

"Asparagus, * Elizabeth!"

"Yes, the first cutting, sir."

"I think you spoil me."

"Do I, sir?"

"I'm afraid so."

That was all that passed between them. Neither of them spoke of Joanna, and Miss Allison wondered whether he would ask that question: "Joanna back yet?" He did not ask it. Joanna and her lad seemed to have made it a day.

She took his coffee into the library, and found him in his favourite chair, feet up, filling a pipe.

"Thank you, Elizabeth."

He smiled up at her, and almost she divined mature laughter in his eyes, and heard him saying to her:

"The old fool has shed his folly, * Elizabeth. Life has given me a dose of raw youth to drink."

Miss Allison sat down to her own supper with the evening sunlight shining in. She had laid a place for Joanna, but no Joanna joined her at the table. Miss Allison was conscious of a strange sense of peace, as though youth had never invaded Lammas, and all the care of it was her^s. Was she being heartless? But why ask that question? Youth was fulfilling its

purpose, and taking and giving that which life desired.

The dusk came down. The birds had said their say, and Joanna still lingered. Miss Allison cleared away and washed up, with the curtains undrawn and the lights on, feeling once again that this house was hers. She listened, but no sound came to her from that other room; he was there with his pipe and his book, as though no Joanna had ever come into his world.

She went to collect his coffee-cup, and found him deep in the chair, reading.

"Shall I draw the curtains, sir?"

"No, you can leave them, Elizabeth."

As she turned away, something fluttered and struck the window, Miss Allison, startled, saw a bat fly away into the dusk.

"Hullo, what was that, Elizabeth?"

"A bat, sir."

She went out, closing the door gently, and Magnal put his book down. The words of the Tennysonian song had fluttered into the twilight of memory.

"Come into the garden, Maud.

The black bat night has flown."

Oh, a damn Tennyson and all love songs!

Miss Allison sat up sewing.

It was black night in the orchard.

She heard Magnal go upstairs to bed. His door closed, and the sound was final.

The tall clock struck ten, and Miss Allison counted the strokes as though each vibration added yet another bead to the rosary of her good content. Security, peace, solitude. She sewed on. She knew that she would sit there, sewing, until youth returned, and she, in her secret and smiling mood, could savour youth's temper.

It was half past ten when Miss Allison heard a little sound, a significant sound, a faint clicking of the latch of the yard door. Miss Allison had taken the precaution of locking both doors. She had seen nothing pass the window, and when she heard that sound she rose with a little secret smile, and went out into the passage, and turned on the light. So, Joanna had hoped to steal in unnoticed!

Miss Allison unlocked and opened the door.

"My dear, here you are at last."

There was no answer from Joanna. She seemed to hang back and hide herself in a sheath of darkness, and the light did not reach her face, though it touched her skirt and legs, and the basket in her hand.

"Had a good day?"

"Yes."

Miss Allison drew back and Joanna stepped into the light, and when Elizabeth Allison saw Joanna's face she knew that something had happened to Joanna. There was dishevelment here, a kind of pale ecstasy like the afterglow of some vivid emotion, fear, shrinking. Joanna's eyes were like two dark blots of shadow. She stood for an instant, not looking at Miss Allison, but beyond her, and then she slid in and past the elder woman, and still carrying her basket, made for the stairs.

Miss Allison stood staring after her. ~~She saw the crumpled skirt, the loosened hair, for Joanna were hers in a~~
~~bob.~~ Slowly and gently ~~Miss Allison~~ closed the door and leaned against it, with her hand to her cheek.

Yes, something had happened to Joanna, something that a girl may clutch to her bosom and wish to hide. No wonder that Joanna had shirked meeting the calm eyes of maturity!

Spain

Magnal had become incorrigibly simple in his way of living, ~~and in his savouring of life.~~ He woke at five, got up at six, enjoyed a nap after lunch, and grew sleepy at half past nine. These simplicities should have warned him that his rhythm was that of September, and have persuaded him to reflect that there are other and statelier satisfactions than the insanities of sex. Magnal woke on that morning in May to hear the birds singing in the Mistover thorns, and he lay for a moment, relaxed and dreamy, ~~soothed by the serenity of the dawn and the matins of the feathered world.~~

"Wait a bit, wait a bit. Will he do it, will he do it?" sang a thrush.

Then came a blackbird's deep cry.

"Joanna, - Joanna."

"Damn!" said Magnal, and swung out of bed.

Confound these elementals, this poignant restlessness! He drew back the curtains and uncovered that splendid sunrise. Why not be content with such loveliness, and leave youth to have its way? He slipped into his dressing-gown and went downstairs to satisfy another native habit, the personal making and collecting of his early morning tea. The pretty china, red cherries and green leaves, would be waiting on its round oak tray, and the bread and the butter and the

milk ready to his hand. Miss Allison never forgot a tea-spoon or a good sharp knife for the bread. A comforting creature, A Elizabeth. Magnal lit the oil stove which served for this function, put the kettle on, and cut his bread and butter. Was not such butter better than the sour juice of the grape?

But he was not to be quite alone this morning. He was filling the teapot when Elizabeth Allison came down the stairs. She, too had heard the birds singing.

"Good morning, Elizabeth. You are early."

Miss Allison's face was strangely serene.

"Such a lovely morning."

Magnal picked up his tray.

"Joanna came back - ?"

"At about half past ten."

Magnal walked past her, and carried his tea into the library.

It was good - that tea, and so was the bread and butter. Next came the fine fresh flavour of the day's first pipe. He sat in his chair and smoked, and watched the sun shooting arrows of gold into and over the ^{er}flowing thorns. So, Joanna had remained out all day with Mr. Hubert Blore, and had lingered with him through the dusk into the seductive darkness. Well, wasn't that evidential and final? ¶ But what next?

The young man might strike him as being a rather poisonous product but the new youth might be like that or appear so to the elderly, and Joanna, being young, might like ^{that} ~~what~~ nauseated a man of fifty. Was this serious business? Did young Blore mean business, or was he just a philanderer? And ought not he, Modred Magnal, to play the part of the responsible guardian and talk like a father to Hubert Blore?

But why interfere? Interference could be so damnable, and produce such negative reactions. Was he to behave like one of those inexorable ladies who spend their lives in exerting uplift and in minding everybody's business but their own? No, let these young things have their play. There was a hardness in him this morning. He had laughed at himself and been laughed at. Compete with a creature like young Blore? If Joanna fancied Hubert, there was nothing to be said about it.

Magnal went up and bathed and shaved and dressed, and took his time about it, and even whistled in his bath. The cement in him had set. He would follow old Landor. Fancy that tough old gentleman becoming silly about a girl! Life had numberless compensations for the mature, tobacco, old wine, peace, jam roll, the smell of the thorns on a May morning, work, the serene thoughts that crowned your head in the summer twilight, a warm and welcoming bed. Why, even

old Bob the dog was celibate, and did not run wild after women.

Magnal wandered out and up to the chapel. The dew was on the thorns and the grass, but the warming sunlight had begun to draw the smell from the mayflower. Magnal savoured it, and was smitten by a sudden pang. He went and stood by the gravestone of that other Magnal. What lay down there? Nothing but rotting oak and a boxful of bones. Dead. ¶ So, was he - to youth. If he had been twenty years, ten years younger!

Joanna was late.

It was a strangely solemn and aloof young woman who walked slowly down the stairs, and took her place at the table opposite Elizabeth Allison. There was silence between them. Joanna's hair was sleek, and her frock creaseless. She ate bacon and eggs with large-eyed solemnity.

Miss Allison had given Joanna one comprehensive look. - Now, what was the impression she groped for? There was a certain emotional setting to the picture.

Of course - ! The Annunciation. ~~Joanna was no longer the virgin, but the conception - though mysterious - would not have been immaculate!~~

Magnal, sitting at his desk in the library, was presented with the picture of a new person. He had heard the porch door open, and he saw Joanna in a flowery frock and a little black hat, walk down the path to the gate. Joanna was going out, and Joanna did not hurry. She cast no anxious glances behind her, asked for no permission. Joanna had become woman; she was claiming her own rights and a lover. No by your leave here. - Well, and what of it?

Magnal stroked his chin. Cool customers - the young! Joanna and Master Hubert were taken with each other, and his part in the play appeared to be that of paternal spectator. But was it no more than that? If the affair was serious had he not some responsibilities to consider? What did he or Joanna know of the essential Hubert Blore, this blob from Bloomsbury who might be no more than a ~~sex~~ play boy?

Ought he not to tackle young Blore?

But how out of fashion was that proposition! "Young man, what are your intentions?" And modern youth might retort - "You damned well mind your own business." Youth's intentions were - of course - to persuade the surrender of the female, and woman - if she so willed it - could make

her own terms and legalise the bargain. Was Joanna no more than an innocent child, or was she quite capable of taking care of herself? Yes, that was the pith of the problem.

Magnal, as a tolerant philosopher, was at a disadvantage. Was love ever tolerant, or youth magnaminous? There may be no compassion in lust, and had Magnal behaved as primitive man the solution of the problem might have been more easy. But Magnal's thrust was against himself. Was he not a prejudiced person? What right had he to interfere?

Yet, that evening he was moved to speak to Joanna. She and Hubert Blore had been to Blenborough, looking at shop windows, and at a particular window. Blore knew how to hint at the purchase of a conventional symbol. Magnal was strolling down the greenway before dinner when he met Joanna returning.

"Hallo, - Joanna, had a good day?"

His attitude of acceptance was planned to reassure her. He wanted to appear ~~being in~~ sympathetic, before attempting fatherly conversation.

"Yes, thank you."

Her little face was strangely expressionless. She did not look at him. It was as though she had put on a mask and was resisting all interference. And suddenly Magnal

divined the stranger in her, an almost hostile stranger. He was conscious of a kind of nakedness, something unseemly in himself. It shocked him. In these few days the girl who had been his playmate had become woman, aloof, individual, ready to resist, and to walk coldly and determinedly past him. How strange, and how disconcerting! This was an utterly new Joanna. Magnal felt that he was looking at a child who had taken some potent drug, and whose whole personality had been transfigured. He was mute.

"Just strolling down to the Long Barrow before dinner."

"Are you?"

How casual and distant those two words sounded! Almost they suggested that he might go to Jericho, and that an old man became superfluous when a girl had fallen in love.

She passed on, head up, her little face ruthless and aloof, and Magnal went upon his way.

~~Assuredly, there was no escape from the shocks life might administer to you!~~

So, three more days went by, and Joanna spent them with her lover, while Magnal and Elizabeth Allison were like two mute ghosts, watching ~~the~~ life in deathly silence. Lammas felt strange to both of them. Something had come,

and something had gone. Even the eyes of Bob the dog had a puzzled look in the trowse of his hair.

"What is all this, Master? No one seems to be in a playful mood."

They were not.

Space

~~At 11.~~

The days progressed, and ^{Joanna} Joanna did her duty in the house, but with the air of a young woman whose thoughts and prospects were elsewhere. She had a listening look. She was waiting upon many things, and not the least bothersome were the possible whims of the master. ~~Would he need her today?~~ Though the task might be transitory, she was still his helper and amanuensis. She was ready with the plea - "Would you mind, sir, my being free today? I expect my fiancée." What a word for lover!

But Magnal did not claim her, or gain a chance to observe either her face or her festal frock. ^{On this final day} She took to herself the task of dusting the parlour, partly because she needed a front window and a point of view. About ten o'clock she saw Magnal go out into the garden, and turn to the right down the green way. He carried a large notebook, and she judged that his bourn was Greenbury, and for a moment, while accepting his absence as helpful, she was conscious of a callow pity. Poor old Mr. Magnal! ~~And before the arrival upon earth of the veritable Apollo she had imagined herself in love with the master.~~

Joanna hummed to herself while she moved about with a desultory duster. She made many visits to the window, to look down upon the green way and the flowering thorns. Her young self was full of the new, ~~organic ecstasy, the~~

intoxication of youth and the senses, the sweet madness that can be so sudden and disastrous. She had taken to the pollen like a bee, save that she was not neuter.

He was coming. She would hear his voice singing her name. "Jo-anna, Jo-anna." They had so many things to talk of, dreams to dream. - Would he want her to leave Lammas soon and live with him in London? Could they be made man and wife in the old chapel? They had knelt there together last night. Mr. Magnal and Aunt Bess would have to be told. That would be Hubert's privilege.

How suddenly it had all happened!

Yes, they must have been meant for each other.

Joanna could find nothing more to dust and put in order, and her lover lingered. Joanna grew restless. Her face lost its secret sheen and caught the edge of the shadows. She went down and out into the garden, and waited at the gate. Had Hubert met Mr. Magnal and turned to walk and talk with him? Her restlessness increased. She opened the gate and followed the green way down through the thorns until she reached the open country. Her dark eyes searched it and saw nothing but the grassland sleeking itself in the sunlight. ♪ How strange!

The day wore on, and still the lover tarried, and Joanna, called by Miss Allison into the kitchen, was requested to peel potatoes. Peel potatoes! Miss Allison was in one of

her most silent moods, but this silence did not mean that she too was not watching and wondering. Joanna had a listening look, and her eyes kept wandering to the window.

"I want two lettuces, Joanna, and some radishes."

Joanna was self absorbed and Miss Allison had to repeat the request.

"Lettuces, A Aunt Bess?"

"Yes, from the frame. A Have you collected the eggs?"

"No."

"I want some for an omelette."

Joanna rose slowly, found a basket, and went out with an air of listlessness. Miss Allison observed her. Well, obviously, Joanna was expecting the young man, and the young man procrastinated. Now - why? A sudden suspicion struck Elizabeth, and she stood very still, staring at the jam tart that was in the process of creation. Miss Allison frowned to herself. Surely - this love affair was not an illusion?

Joanna was collecting the brown eggs from the nesting-boxes. Of course, that was what had happened. Hubert had met Magnal and gone with him to Greenbury to make his confession and talk over their plans for the future.

~~Medred~~ Magnal had climbed Greenbury hill and was sitting by the dewpond. He had opened up the hut, and arranged certain exhibits that needed recording in his notebook, but somehow the urge was not in him, and these relics of old Rome seemed what they were - dead things. He missed - what? That exquisite little flower of a face, and the play of light in the sloe-black eyes.

"Oh, ♀ Joanna, ♀ what have we here?"

"Gently, Joanna, ♀ shake gently."

How often they had knelt over the sieve, while she had shaken it and he had picked out some treasure from the soil, ♀ their heads close together like two people at prayer! What a strange world was this! He had been martyred by his fellow men, and had cut off the dust and said - "Get thee far from me. I will live alone." What an illusion was escape! First - the dog had come, and then the woman, to be followed by the girl. His world had seemed to shape itself anew, calmly and with a serene loveliness, and then - youth had arrived, this bounding blot of masculinity, to remind him that he was forty nine years old.

A young man in floppy trousers, with a glib little mouth under its smudge of hair, a thing that he could have taken by the collar and shaken as a large dog shakes a rat.

A rat?

Supposing the simile was actual? Was he being fair to this child in suffering her to surrender to the importunities of sex? In his immoderate pride he had shrugged his shoulders and turned his back on the affair, and said "Am I the girl's keeper?" "But was he? Well, yes, in a sense he was. ~~His compassion had been outfaced by a sneering, petulant pride. He might be being little while proposing to be big.~~

Over yonder lay Bareacres. He could see the distant buildings between Five Barrow Down and Ash Wood, and his gaze seemed to focus his thoughts upon the immediate problem. Why not walk to Bareacres and have a talk with Blore, if Blore was at Bareacres and not with Joanna? Had he a right to talk the big brother stuff to Blore? Most certainly he had, as man to man, and not as a mere parental pedagogue. "Look here, my lad, this girl is still a child in many ways. She has led a very isolated life. Don't hurt her."

Yes, that was the test, magnanimity, compassion. He was conscious of feeling a new serenity as he descended Greenbury and cut across country to Bareacres. He had forgotten to lock up the hut, but did that matter? One could lock up too many things in life. And so, he came to Bareacres, and found John Wise tinkering at his reaper, with an eye on an early hay harvest. John Wise's hands were black and greasy. A spanner had slipped, and he had blooded a knuckle and was

sucking it.

"Morning, Mr. Wise. Is Mr. Blore about?"

The farmer's eyes were round and oxlike. He spat.

"Mr. Blore? Why he be gone."

"Gone?"

"Yes, the first thing this morning."

Magnal's face went grim.

"Rather sudden, Mr. Wise. Did you expect him to leave so soon?"

"Well, no, sir. He just said as he had business to do, and he packed up and left."

"Did he say where he was going?"

"He did not, sir."

Magnal changed the subject. He did not want John Wise or his wife to think that the young man's sudden exodus was important. But what was its importance, not to young Hubert Blore, but to Joanna? Had it any importance or was it any more than the easy exit of a philanderer? Blore might have gone to Lammas. He might find the young man at Lammas. Blore's reason might be a good one, and the explanation adequate.

Magnal left John Wise to his reaper, and set out on the return journey, not realising perhaps that he was frowning.

He found Miss Allison alone in the kitchen.

"Elizabeth, is Mr. Blore here?"

"Mr. Blore? - Why, no, I don't think so, sir."

"Has he been here?"

"I haven't seen him."

"Where's Joanna?"

"I'm not sure. ♣ She may be in the museum - drawing something."

"Thank you, ♣ Elizabeth."

Magnal went out and across the yard to the old barn, but Joanna was not there.

He stood, shocked by a sudden suspicion. Had these two young things gone off together? He could not believe it, or would not believe it. Joanna would not have done such a thing. ♣ But did not the young do surprising things when this Spring madness was upon them? Magnal closed the barn door, moved away, paused rather helplessly in the middle of the yard, and stood rubbing his forehead. If the thing had happened what a mess the girl might have made of her first affair of the heart. To run away with a poetaster and trousered popinjay like Hubert Blore!

Magnal was profoundly troubled. How responsible was he for this crisis? ♣ Damn it, Joanna could not have done such a mad and graceless thing! In his perturbation he walked out into the green way, and up it towards the chapel; there was anger in him, and more than anger.

He turned to lean against the wall of the curtilage,

and then his eyes happened to travel to the chapel door. It was open, and that little sombre slit of shadow challenged him. He slipped along the wall and into the graveyard to the chapel entrance. He looked in and saw Joanna. She was kneeling at the altar, her frock like a streak of amber light in that dim and silent place.

Magnal drew back and away like some large, wild creature exerting stealth, but the frown had gone from his face. He was conscious of profound relief, and of more than relief. He seemed to become aware of the sky and the flowering thorns and the grasses, and the unsmirched freshness of this lovely world. You should not look at such a world with a frown on your face or with fear or deceit in your heart. A sudden tender gaiety fluttered up in him like a bird taking to the air. Thank God Joanna was not tarnished. If she could go on her knees in that solitary place then any evil thing might be far from her. Maybe she knew that the young man had gone. Maybe she was giving thanks for his going, or praying for his return. Anyway, she had not gone with him, and blowflies like Blore might buzz for a day, but they blew out of the window and did not return.

Magnal met Bob in the green way, and he and the dog played a mock game of fisticuffs and paw-pats together. Almost, they romped into the house and upset Miss Allison and her jam tart which was travelling parlourwards.

"Sorry, Elizabeth. ~~My~~ I found Joanna."

"Did you, sir?"

"Yes, kneeling in the chapel."

He might be in a laughing mood, but Miss Allison was silent, and infinitely grave. She was not man, but woman, and when a woman fell on her knees disturbing happenings might be inferred. How serious was this business, how exquisitely and utterly serious?

Joanna and Elizabeth Allison faced each other across the dinner table, but it was a confrontation in which they looked everywhere but at each other. Joanna was mute, and hurried over her meal, and then had to sit and stare at the window while waiting for her more deliberate vis-a-vis to finish. The tension grew and became active discomfort.

"Don't wait if you want to go."

"Thank you, Aunt Bess. Shall I help you?"

"No, I can manage."

Joanna vanished. She wanted to be alone with her own thoughts and emotions. She went out by the back way, and through the thorns to the open country, and she made for Greenbury, and climbing it, sat down by the dewpond and looked at the landscape. Would she see any figure of significance there? She had begun to doubt it. ~~My~~ She saw

no figure. Starkly and with a young calmness she confronted the reality. So, he had gone. He had gone without telling her that he was going. Somehow, she knew it, was sure of it. Her young body had been a cup of wine to him, and he had drained it and passed on.

Joanna shivered. She felt cold, cold in body and in spirit. This almost incredible callousness, or so it seemed, had shocked her, and more than that. She was afraid. For, she had given him too much, and he had taken it and left her. No, he was not ill, or anything of that sort. She knew. He had left her to bear the consequences. And what were they?

XXX.

The ~~characteristic~~ mood of Lammas became ^{one of} a conspiratorial cheerfulness, yet neither Magnal nor Miss Allison was at ease with the situation. Miss Allison, having dreamed dreams and seen them vanish into smoke, suffered from a new and dry-eyed clarity of vision. Joanna would remain with them, to tantalise both man and matron.

Moreover, neither of her elders was so selfish as to be unaware of the change in the girl. She had become mute, tame with a kind of wide eyed docility, like a child suffering from some secret humiliation. It was "Yes, Aunt Bess," or "No, Mr. Magnal," gentle consent and equally gentle negation. She had wilted. The vital, vivid creature had lost her ~~quick~~ colour and her sparkle. She had trusted and she had given, even though the giving had been midsummer madness, and something was both ⁹live and dead in her.

Magnal behaved rather like a large Newfoundland dog. He was hearty and almost blatant in his playfulness. The girl had suffered no damage, save that of an emotional shock, and perhaps some hurt to her pride. She would get over it. She would recover normality. It was just an attack of emotional measles. The thing was for Joanna to pick up the threads, get back to work, resume her artist's craft, play with the dog, have a new frock or two and some

pleasure jaunts, and forget philandering squabs such as Hubert Blore.

Miss Allison's reaction was more subtle. She would have said that for a distinguished ex-physician Magnal's sex psychology was less adequate than that of the dustman. Or was Mr. Magnal throwing dust in his own eyes? Elizabeth Allison was troubled, not only for Joanna's sake, but for her own, for Miss Allison's hypersensitive conscience was telling her that she had sinned against innocence. Moreover, this dim, docile, mouselike creature who crept about the house moved Miss Allison to elemental pity, and ^{to a} compassion that no competitive jealousy could subdue. Elizabeth Allison remembered her own illusions and the slaying of them, and the woman in her rallied to the wounded woman in Joanna.

Something was very ^{was} weary, more ^{was} weary than mere frustration. Miss Allison was worried. Her conscience would not be silenced, for she had been silent when she should have spoken; ~~she had suffered a secret selfishness to sacrifice to Satan.~~ Miss Allison may not have believed in Satan, but she did believe in God, and she knew that her God was not pleased with her. So, Elizabeth Allison was not pleased with herself, and confessed it on her knees, and was gentle with Joanna.

Did not Mr. Magnal see? Must he be so hearty and

cheerful, and take Joanna up to Roman House and pretend that the old world was the same? Joanna went, and with a dumb docility helped him with the work. She sat at the table at night sketching some Roman relic, while Miss Allison sat and sewed and became more and more sure that Joanna carried in her more than a wounded pride.

Miss Allison was an early riser, and one morning while she was dressing she heard a sound that made her stand very still. The sound came from Joanna's room. It could come from nowhere else. For some seconds Miss Allison remained rigid, her hair brush held where it had been when the sound had reached her, as though some sudden palsy had struck her. Then she ^{found} laid the brush on the dressing-table, went softly to her door, opened it with deliberate care, and stepped out into the passage.

There was no doubt about that sound, and Miss Allison's face went pinched and white. She knew now what she knew.

She stood there irresolute, shocked into hesitant passivity. What should she do? There was a part of her that shrank from doing anything. She was confounded and dismayed. Why should this thing have happened in what had been this most peaceful house? It was revolting; it was - . But when that particuliar but unuttered word rose into her

consciousness, she was shaken by a sudden spasm of emotion. Gracious God, what was she then, a hypocritical, pestilent prude, a sexless prig? Was she not woman? Could she not be woman to this child? And suddenly her heart beat fast and full in her. She came alive. She might become that which she had never been, a mother.

Miss Allison knocked softly at Joanna's door.

There was silence, a silence as of fear.

Miss Allison knocked again.

"Joanna, my dear."

A little voice answered her.

"Yes, Aunt Bess?"

"Aren't you well?"

"No, Aunt Bess."

"May I come in?"

Miss Allison did not wait for the answer. It was the mother-woman who turned the handle and entered. The room was in half-darkness, but Elizabeth could distinguish the figure in the bed, an almost crouching figure, handkerchief to mouth.

"Oh, Aunt Bess - ."

Miss Allison closed the door, and moved into the room.

"Don't, Aunt Bess."

"Don't what, dear?"

"Let the light in."

Miss Allison swept in one quick movement to the bed. She sat down on it, and the figure in its white nightdress came suddenly into her arms. Miss Allison lifted her, drew her, had her in her lap. There were no tears. Joanna was trembling; she just clung to Elizabeth Allison and was mute.

Miss Allison stroked Joanna's hair.

"What shall I do, ♡ Aunt Bess?"

That - indeed - was a problem!

"Nothing, dear, ♡ just yet."

"Do you think me - awful?"

Miss Allison hesitated, not because of self-righteousness, but because she was remembering her own story.

"Things happen to all of us, ♡ Joanna. ♡ The blame was - if there is blame - ."

"I think I was a little - mad, Aunt Bess. ♡ Do you know times - when - everything - is - everything together? ♡ I thought he - ."

"Of course, my dear. ♡ That young man was a heartless cad. One gets carried away. ♡ Did you love him very much?"

"I did. ♡ Isn't it strange? - I wanted to give. He seemed to make me lose myself."

"You don't love him any more?"

"How could I?"

There was silence between them for a while, and Miss

Allison went on stroking Joanna's hair, and feeling that she too had found herself.

"Aunt Bess."

"Yes, dear?"

"He will have to know, won't he?"

"You mean - the master?"

"Yes."

Miss Allison held Joanna fast, and felt that she was holding herself.

"Yes, dear, he will."

"Do you think he will turn me out? Oh, - I don't want to go away from here."

"I'm sure he will not do that."

"I have been such a beast to you both, Aunt Bess. Why was I made to feel like that?"

"Some times we do things - that we would not do, Joanna. Something carries us over the edge. I once did a dreadful thing."

"You, Aunt Bess!"

"Yes, perhaps, some day I will tell you about it."

"But you are always so - good and kind."

"Am I, my dear? There are times when I have been a very selfish and wicked woman."

Joanna turned and put her face to Elizabeth Allison's.

"I don't believe it - . I can bear the light - now.
I'll get up and dress."

She slipped out of Miss Allison's arms, and Miss Allison went and drew back the curtains. ⁴ Another wonderful day, serene and splendid. ⁴ She saw the hills. ⁴ There was a sudden strange happiness in her, and her eyes looked dewy.

Now, according to the realists, Miss Allison held all the cards in her hand. She could either play them at her leisure or throw her hand down on the table and collect that which was hers. She could go to Magnal and say ⁴ "This ~~dirty~~ little wench has fouled the nest. She is pregnant. Such ingratitude! ⁴ But it may be excessively awkward for you, sir. People might say - ." No doubt she would not have put it so crudely, but produced the picture in sad, subtle half-tones. Presumably, that colourful young man was a black-guard, but for a girl to commit the final act with him after ^{few} ~~three~~ days' acquaintanceship was - really - too suggestive. It moved you to consider Joanna Foster's heritage, and to remember that a pretty, baby face might conceal most unpleasant tendencies.

Miss Allison did not seize her opportunity. What the solution would be was beyond her for the moment. The life at Lammas had lost its perspective. And what a nice, sinister

study some cynic might have made of it. Here were a defrocked physician, an ex-murderess, and a little "Elemental" bred in a communal institution, living together in eccentric and peculiar seclusion. The inference shouted at you. Lammas was a Love Nest and not very clean at that. The only innocent creature in it was the dog.

Miss Allison bided her time and was very gentle with Joanna. She wanted to be sure. Moreover, she could assume that ~~Mered~~ Magnal, ex-physician, might still retain some professional acumen, and observe what must become obvious. Yes, Magnal had told Elizabeth Allison his story, perhaps to convince her that - socially - both of them were outcasts. If Mr. Magnal discovered the situation for himself a very embarrassing confession might be avoided.

But ~~Mered~~ Magnal saw nothing, save that Joanna, as sometimes happens with women, appeared to have developed a more sensuous bloom. She looked plumper, sleeker, and her colour had returned. No wan, shadow-eyed, sickly creature this! Magnal was gentle with Joanna. He told himself that a part of the fault had been his, and with a mature self-restraint he chose to give Joanna her leisure to forget. Of course she would forget. A little blot like Blore did not remain in the picture in perpetuity.

It was a strange blindness - this - of ~~Moored~~ Magnal's, due to one of those self-imposed attitudes to life. Maybe, he saw himself now as the man of forty-nine, magnanimous, comprehending, content to leave his rose on the bush, and to enjoy its perfume. As to the ultimate confrontation, it must be confessed that he shirked the issue. He was no Hubert Blore, but a man of ^{confusion} ~~pity~~ and of sensitive understanding. He dallied with his dream, and maybe he preferred it as a dream, a pretty tableau which he could uncover when he willed it, and with the secret smile of the wise humorist. Let Joanna grow out of the Blore phase into a richer comprehension of sex. Hubert Blore was just a symbol, a period through which youth must pass.

So, the summer drew on, and life in Joanna burgeoned, and Magnal laboured at his excavations, and brought Mr. Bull over to plan a final reconstruction. Roman House should rise again, and stand upon a Wiltshire hill as a live picture of Roman Britain. It should even be garnished as it had been, and all the treasures that had been recovered from it should return. It would be a veritable Museum Piece, open to the interested and the elect.

Magnal indulged in a romantic fancifulness. This should be a live house. * He could go up and dwell there now and again, and feel himself back in Roman Britain, and savour

its realities. He might even dress the part. It would be enormous fun. And perhaps, Joanna, that Mediterranean girl, would play the part with him, sit upon cushions in the summer room and peer at her face in a Roman mirror.

XXXI.

It fell to Elizabeth Allison's lot to shatter this dream. Surely, Modred Magnal had eyes? And yet he did not see, and the problem was actual and urgent. It was now the first week in September, and Joanna herself was beginning to fear the postponement of the inevitable confession.

"Oh, Aunt Bess, he must ^{little} I can't go on like this."

"No, my dear, you can't."

"What - shall - I do? It frightens me. Sometimes I want to run away."

"I must tell him, Joanna. Would you rather - I - ?"

"Oh, - please."

So, it was agreed between them. Miss Allison sent Joanna out of the house with Bob, and then went upon her mission. It was the hour after tea when Magnal liked to sit at his desk and smoke, and play with the plans of Roman House. It was to be of two stories, white walled and red tiled, with round glass in the casements. It was to have a forecourt and a cryptoporticus and a porter's ledge, and a formal garden and a fountain at the back of it. The little lararium, that chamber of death, was to become itself again, with the Dea Mater upon her pedestal, and earthenware lamps in the niches. Magnal was deep in this archaeological game when Elizabeth Allison knocked at his door.

"Yes?"

"May I come in, sir?"

"Come in, ~~M~~ Elizabeth."

Now, a man who is in the process of becoming a visionary, may be increasingly short-sighted in the observing of his fellows, but Magnal had cause to recognise Elizabeth Allison's attitude when she had some important matter to discuss with him. She would close the door and stand with her back to it, erect and austere, hands folded, the right over the left. She stood so now, and in silence, as though she found it difficult to begin.

"Well, ~~M~~ Elizabeth, what's the problem?"

His big head was turned to her, and he was smiling. He had been in a happy and constructive mood, at play with his own fancies. Miss Allison's lips were thin. This ~~severely~~ ^{severe} ~~severity~~ could be exasperating when you had some very embarrassing conversation ^{form} to make, and Miss Allison was thinking "Oh, ~~M~~ Man, you are going to receive a shock."

"It is about Joanna, sir."

Her voice was as formal as her stance.

"Oh, ~~M~~ Joanna? ~~M~~ She's not worrying about that blot?"

"Haven't you noticed anything, sir?"

"No. ~~M~~ I thought she had been looking rather well.

What is the - ?"

Miss Allison felt that procrastination was more than

the thief of time. It could be as disconcerting as an unseeing man. Well, let the bag be opened and the secret jump.

"Joanna is going to have a baby."

Had the occasion been less ~~grave~~^c Miss Allison might have discovered humour in the reactions of the male. Magnal's head went up as though he had been hit on the chin. His hands grasped the arms of his chair. For a moment he sat rigid, staring at Elizabeth Allison. Then, in one quick movement he was on his feet. The shock had electrified him.

"What, ⁴ Elizabeth - ?"

"Just that, sir. ⁴ You did not seem to notice, so - "

"Good God!" said Magnal, ⁴ and again "Good God!".

He walked round his desk to the window and stood with his back to her, head up, his pointed beard jutting out. There was a redness about his neck and ears, and suddenly Miss Allison realised that this was no figure of fun, but that of a large and fierce animal shut up with her in this quiet room. Anger, - yes. And was it against Joanna? ⁴ Would she have to stand and hold the door, and plead?

He did not move, and when he spoke his voice was unexpectedly quiet.

"Are you - sure, ⁴ Elizabeth?"

"I think there is no doubt."

"Our nice visitor, ^{my} Blore, of course?"

"Yes."

She could not see his face, but she could see the fierce set of his shoulders.

"It is going to be a terrible - problem, Mr. Magnal."

He did not answer her. He was perhaps, almost more savage with himself than with young Blore. Fool! ⁴ But how incredible! Was youth so easily persuaded? ⁴ And Joanna!

"I find it difficult ⁴ Elizabeth, to - "

"I know you must, sir."

"Why, the young cad was only here - ."

Miss Allison stiffened and was mute.

^{a few} "Three days or so. - Good Lord, that a girl should - ."

"Are we here to judge?"

He turned at these words, and looked at her, and she felt that her question had gone home.

"Touched, ⁴ Elizabeth. ⁴ You are a good woman. If anybody needs scourging - my back should offer itself. ⁴ I - thought - that I was giving youth ⁴ it's chance. ⁴ What I should have done - ."

"I know, sir."

"Taken that young blackguard by the collar, and - ."

But, damn it, it's Joanna's - tragedy, if you can call that sort of thing tragedy. * How long have you known?"

"Weeks, sir."

"You should have told me."

"I thought, sir, that you might - see."

Suddenly his head went back and he laughed, but it was grim laughter.

"Touched again, * Elizabeth. * And I - once - was a physician. But, about Joanna."

"She's terribly - distressed."

"Poor kid!"

"You see, * she^{has} lived a very sheltered life. * I've been at fault too. * She's very innocent - about men."

"And she believed in that young brute."

"Yes."

"I suppose she would. * My fault again for letting him near her. * I must be growing old, * Elizabeth. * By God, this is going to take some thinking about."

He stood and stared at the empty grate. Oh, that strong neck, and those formidable shoulders! Miss Allison was moved to speak.

"I - I - want to stand by her, sir. * I don't want - "

He turned sharply.

"Gosh, M Elizabeth, do you think I am going to play Jehovah?"

"No, M sir - ."

"I've got to think this thing out."

According to the modern minded both Magnal and Miss Allison were behaving in a very old fashioned way. Here was a girl who had sacrificed to impulse and to nature, and nature had the laugh of her elders. Such naturalness might put these same elders in an awkward predicament, but why declaim and strike dramatic attitudes. ~~Joanna had engaged herself, and someone would have to pay the piper.~~

Miss Allison drew aside and opened the door.

"Would you like to see Joanna, sir?"

Magnal's big head gave a toss, and he stared rather like a bewildered bull.

"I - ? - No, not at the moment. W I'm darned if I should know what to say to her. A I've got to think this thing out, Elizabeth."

"Very good, sir, A but Joanna will be - ."

"Waiting?"

"Well, yes, sir. A We agreed that I should tell you?"

Magnal gave a heave of the shoulders.

"Tell her - I'm not angry with her. A Yes, that's true. W I'm angry with myself and that young blot. The

kid has been left - ." almost he had said "with the baby."

"I'll tell her, sir.

"You might leave me alone now, ⁴ Elizabeth."

"Very good, sir," and she left him.

Magnal went up to Greenbury. He wanted to be alone, far away, high up above the world, in contact with the untarnished turf and that serene September sky, for, in his Romant of the Rose, the flower was tarnished. It had a maggot in it. Magnal might acknowledge the inevitableness of nature and the need for perpetuating ⁴ the race, but never had he been able to see any beauty in those greasy little bodies that are extruded from the maternal womb. Indeed, there was no beauty in the procreative act when performed by others, and especially so upon the body of one's particular fancy. ~~It became repulsive, and a cynic might have described~~ ~~Magnal as a shabby old cock perched on a dunghill and with indignation discovering a young male treading his favourite hen.~~

Magnal, being man and fastidious man, found himself involved in such emotions. Pah, ⁴ what a nasty business! But the very nastiness of the flavour made other gorges rise. Was he to give way to these primitive reactions, and at his age? Had he no chivalry, no pity? Chivalry! What an

obsolete pose was that! But, damn it all, surely he could do better than ~~to~~ flounder into a sex-rage like some turgid lout? Where was his philosophy? Or, better still, where was his humanity? Did he really desire, like some angry oriental potentate, to have young Blore strangled, and the girl put in a sack and thrown into the Bosphorus?

No, of course not. So, as he gazed upon this broad landscape a grim serenity hardened in him. His plan became clear, though it was not the kind of plan that Elizabeth Allison would have chosen. Someone had to be brought to book, and he persuaded to honour his commitments.

Yet, even in formulating a scheme for justice Magnal might have discovered in himself the pride of Jehovah. He would play the Lord God Almighty to Master Hubert Blore. The young man should bow the knee and humble himself - or - . Emotions, even when sublimated, must have opportunities for satisfaction. Righteous indignation sometimes may wear a very hairy shirt under its sacerdotal robes.

But Magnal did one consoling thing. After speaking to Miss Allison he would search out Joanna.

"Oh, * Elizabeth, * I am going up to London for a night or two. Can you manage?"

"Of course, sir."

He did not tell her why he was going, and she did not

ask him, though she may have had her suspicions.

"Do you know where Joanna is?"

"I think she went out with Bob. - She might be in the chapel."

And there Magnal found her, sitting on one of the old oak pews with the dog's head on her knee. Magnal stood looking in and thinking that a dog might be more magnanimous than man. He did not enter the chapel, but spoke from the doorway.

"Joanna, ⁴ I'm sorry, my dear. I feel I am to blame for what has happened."

She did not move, but sat looking down at the dog, her hand on his head.

"Thank you, ⁴ Mr. Magnal."

"I'll do what I can to help."

"Thank you, Mr. Magnal."

He turned away, and he did not see her head and shoulders swing round, or the question her eyes would have asked him. What did he mean by "Helping"? Surely he would not try to bring that young man back into her life?

Magnal travelled by car. On those rare occasions when he spent a night or two in London, buying books, or rummaging in the London Library, he put up at an hotel in Russell

Square. It was large and anonymous, and near the British Museum, and there was a garage not far away from which you could extract your car without having to move twenty other cars and indulge in trick driving. The British Museum itself might serve his purpose; he was known to certain of the experts and the librarians. Did not a copy of every book that was published have to be deposited in the Museum library? Magnal found a "Who's Who" in the hotel writing-room, but Hubert Blore was still a nobody so far as that volume was concerned.

Pigeons fluttered away from his feet as he crossed the forecourt and climbed the steps of the great portico. He had a very simple question to ask. "Have you a copy of the poems by a man named Hubert Blore?"

The gentleman who was asked the question looked baffled, but he disappeared upon the quest and returned with a jejune volume bound in olive green, its title in gold upon a white label.

"Satan in Surbiton! Hum! - Sounds caustic and very young. I'm afraid I haven't read the gentleman."

"Nor I," said Magnal, "But such a lapse is easily corrected."

He took down the name of the publishers 4 "Messrs, Flinders & Pope", and noted the date of issue. Had Mr. Blore paid for the publication of this masterpiece? He

had not, but Aunt Edith had, and the book had sold exactly seventy three copies, fifty of which had been purchased by Miss Carden and broadcast to an unappreciative world.

"Thanks. That's all I need. Let's see, where do Flinders & Pope function?"

"Ave Maria Row."

"Of course."

Magnal handed back "Satan in Sarbiton", and departed upon his quest.

XXXII.

The pursuit proved to be almost ridiculously easy. The window of the Inquiry Office of Messrs. Flinders & Pope was raised by a bright young blonde who was pleased both with herself and the world. ~~Modred~~ Magnal had the looks of a celebrity, and Miss Blondie collected autographs. Could he see either Mr. Flinders or Mr. Pope? Well, Mr. Flinders was playing golf in Scotland, but Mr. Pope was in. Magnal produced a card and was shown into a waiting-room where booklets advertising the publications of Messrs. Flinders & Pope lay upon the table.

A second blonde appeared, but a de luxe edition, and much more high brow and literary. This was Mr. Pope's secretary. Had Mr. Magnal an appointment? No, he had not.

"Perhaps you could save Mr. Pope wasting his time on me. I believe you publish Mr. Hubert Blore."

"Yes, we - do." said the lady, as though responsible for the favour.

"I am a friend of his, and I have lost his latest address. Yes, just up in town for a day or two. ~~W~~ I wonder if you could give me the address?"

Mr. Pope's secretary put her pencil to her lips, and glanced considerably and with some appreciation at Modred Magnal. His black beard was really quite dominant. And what

a head, what a torso! Some killer - this!

"Yes, I think I might."

"How sympathetic of you. ~~W~~ One doesn't want to waste time when one is up only for a couple of days."

Miss Blondie Senior gave him glamour.

"I'll go and look it up to make sure."

She returned in three minutes with the address on a torn off slip from a memo-pad.

"Mr. Blore was there a month ago."

She passed the slip to Magnal, who read it, and smiled strangely in his beard. Well, - well, the fox's earth was not a quarter of a mile from Russell Square. Mr. Blore's address was No.12, Wellford Street, Bloomsbury.

Magnal thanked Mr. Pope's secretary and departed. It was now eleven o'clock in the morning, and Magnal hailed a taxi and asked to be driven to Wellford Street. He wished to explore the ground. Wellford Street consisted of two rows of flat faced houses, black as to complexion and green or black as to railings, yet retaining for Magnal a smoky, Dickensian charm. This was the London of his student days, and it possessed the mystery of youth's illusions, memories of fog, and of hot summer nights, and the smell of horse-dung, and the roses of the flower sellers. Almost, if not quite, it was the London of the Sedan chair, but most certainly of

Mr. Pickwick, and the hansom cab. Why had those commercial cads wrecked the Adelphi and turned ^{Thank} ~~Mark~~'s Regent Street into mere boring ostentation? And those dear old respectable Victorians! But Wellford Street was not what it had been. Many of its houses had been converted into dubious hotels or shabby-faced boarding houses. It's black satin had gone shiny.

No. 12 was neither an hotel nor a boarding-house, and Magnal could suppose that it let lodgings. He paid off his taxi, strolled up and down and considered the problem of cornering Mr. Blore. It behoved him not to lose the element of surprise. ¶ But did Hubert Blore still reside here? It was very necessary that he should know; so he rang the bell of No. 12.

A tired looking old maid with wisps of hair adding to the lines upon the forehead, answered the bell.

"Is Mr. Blore in?"

"No, he's not."

"Ah, well, I must call again some time. ¶ When should I be most likely to find him in?"

"You never can tell. First thing in the morning, if you ask me, and not too early at that."

"I see. ¶ Thank you very much. No need to tell Mr. Blore that an old friend called. ¶ I'll take my chance

one morning, if I can find the time."

The faded door closed upon the faded face, and Magnal walked off to reflect upon the issue, and to lunch at Boulestin's. It was good for one's mental poise to lunch at Boulestin's. It gave you benignity.

He postulated that benignity would be needed, and it was so, though the benign mood might not endure.

Magnal packed his luggage, paid his hotel bill, and drove in his own car to No.12, Welford Street. The time was nine thirty, an hour when blousy young men might be expected to be up but not out.

Magnal rang the bell, and the same tired woman opened the door to him.

"Mr. Blore in?"

"Yes. " I've just taken up his breakfast."

"Good. " Which floor?"

"Top floor back."

"You needn't bother to show me up. I'll find my own way."

Magnal ascended, deliberate and faintly smiling. It seemed to him that this stuffy house smelt of fish, stale fish. It did. All floors had had kippers for breakfast. So, Mr. Hubert Blore was top floor back, and quite in the poetic tradition, Chatterton & Co., save that Blore was not

Chatterton. Would the young beggar be impudent? Most probably he would be so.

Magnal stood for a moment on a shabby piece of stair carpet. Then he grasped the handle, flung the door wide and walked in.

The surprise was complete. Hubert Blore was at breakfast, clad in sky blue pyjamas, a purple dressing-gown and red slippers. Some colour here! The young man had not shaved. He was both up and not up. Mr. Blore was also eating kipper, and looking stale after a night out.

Magnal closed the door and put his back to it.

"Good morning. Afraid I'm rather early. Go on with your breakfast while we talk."

There are occasions when men are said to go green about the gills, and the description applied to the young man at the table. He stared, and swallowed. This early confrontation might be disconcerting, but Hubert Blore had had some experience of such awkward situations. He could command a quick reaction and a reserve of impudence. He smiled, and his sleepy eyes promised insolence.

"Say - now - isn't this great! " Take a pew, sir."

Magnal remained standing, and for a second or two there was silence. Blore appeared to become bored with kipper; he put it aside and reached for the marmalade.

"How is everybody, sir?"

His glance was upward and pert. Really, the old man was looking very Jovian. Ha, yes, Dr. Modred Magnal, late of Harley Street, whose dirty linen had been washed in public.

"And how is the dear dog, sir?"

Magnal's fists were in his pockets, and he hoped to be able to keep them there.

"I think we had better get down to business, Blore."

"Business, sir?"

"Drop the sir. I'm not senile. ♣ Joanna is going to have a child."

Blore was buttering toast.

"I say, what bad luck!"

"For Joanna."

"No, for you, sir."

For the moment Magnal did not take his meaning.

"I don't matter. ♣ The person who matters - ."

"Don't you feel paternal?"

"I ?"

"Yes. ♣ If not, you ought to have been more careful."

Magnal stiffened his shoulder against the door.

"Cut out the humour, my lad. ♣ What do you propose to do about it?"

"About - what?"

"Your responsibility."

"My - responsibility! A Well, isn't that just cute! What's the great idea? To foist the babe on me?"

"Look here, Blore. I wouldn't adopt that attitude if I were you. It isn't convincing. Joanna ought to know who - ."

Blore smirked at him.

"You can't play the stinking fish game here, Dr. Magnal."

"Oh - ."

"Your reputation won't stand it. You see, I happen to know. A doctor should be like Caesar's wife, what? If you have been playing about, and at your age! - Naughty old man!"

Magnal's hands came out of his pockets.

"Is that your response, Blore?"

"Oh - yeah. If the little bit got fresh with you, why try to sublimate on me. Frankly, I'm not having any. And if you like I'll take you into court. Your moral past wouldn't stand up to cross-examination, would it?"

Spice line.

Magnal stood looking down at the young man crouching in a corner. Once or twice before in his life this Berserker fury had made him dangerous to the thing that had angered him. Good God, * he was too strong to indulge in that sort of madness! Had he hurt the young beast too seriously, for Blore was a figure of tatters, like a doll that has been played with by a large, fierce dog, and left torn and disordered in a corner. His face was a mixture of marmalade and blood, a grotesque and terrified face with all the impudence gone from it. He was panting, shaking, and his fingers were feeling his throat.

It was - perhaps - unlucky for Hubert Blore, and it might have been unlucky for Magnal, that he lodged in the top floor, and that everybody was either out or below stairs, and no one had heard this old black bull tossing youth about the room. There had been no intervener, save Magnal's sudden grip upon his own fury.

He ran a hand over his hair.

"Sorry, * Blore. * But you pushed me too far."

Blore gazed up at him in paralytic terror. He mumbled.

"You nearly strangled me."

"But not quite. * Let us both be thankful for that. *

And don't try it again. * I'm dangerous when I am like this."

Good God, ♫ was he not! The impudence had gone from Blore, like starch out of a soaked shirt, and the little cad in him was craven.

"Get up, man."

Blore squirmed into his corner, and glanced at the bell-push on the wall. And suddenly, Magnal laughed.

"No need to ring bells. ♫ I shan't touch you again if you behave. Get up."

Blore got up, a dishevelled and tremulous object, and as abject as ^a Agag.

"What do you want of me ♫?"

"Better get cleaned up and dressed. ♫ We have a job before us."

"A job?"

"Yes, ♫ I'm taking you down into the country. My car is outside."

Blore's stare of alarmed astonishment was obvious though furtive. He edged round Magnal like a dog eluding a possible kick.

"What, down to your place?"

"Yes."

Blore stood stupefied, a torn pyjama jacket in his hands.

"But, ♫ my dear sir, - do you - ?"

"Get cleaned up and dressed, and don't argue. I'm not

in the mood for it."

The room was a bed-sitting-room, and Magnal, having put some of the furniture to rights, sat down astride a chair, his arms crossed on the back of it. Blore was finicking about almost like a girl who was being compelled to undress with a strange man in her bedroom. He glanced half-protestingly and peevishly at Jupiter.

"All right" said Magnal; "no need to feel coy. ⁴
Having been a doctor, as you know, I'm fairly familiar with the human body."

"I've got to shave."

"Want some hot water?"

"Yes."

"I think you need it."

Magnal got up and rang the bell, and going out on to the landing, waited for the response. He heard flustered and flabby footsteps on the stairs.

"Mr. Blore wants his shaving water."

"Yes, sir."

Magnal waited for the jug and carried it in.

He sat down again to watch the ritual, and his steady gaze was disconcerting to Hubert Blore. He was now in trousers and vest, and bending over the basin, and Magnal, studying him with the eyes of an anatomist, saw an insect

figure. The anger had gone out of him, and in its place lay a great calmness. No wonder this town-bred little decadent had felt like a bundle of rags in his hands. Almost, he was near to pity, but that ruthless pity which can be educative both to pitier and pitied.

"Blore."

There was a grunt. Blore was patting his damaged face with a coloured washing-square, and it was blood and marmalade.

"There are certain things that can be said - now - with complete candour. Listening?"

Another grunt.

"There is no sin in loving a girl. There may be no sin in - seducing her. That's just a point of view. ♣ But to rat and leave her in the lurch, is just - bloody."

Blore was washing out his mouth. He spat into a certain receptacle.

"Rather depends on the girl, doesn't it?"

"Look here, my lad, ♣ I have cooled down, † but if you adopt that tone - I may flare up. ♣ Haven't you any decent feeling about these things?"

Blore was peering at his face in the mirror.

"Oh, go a'head if you want to give me a pi-jaw."

"I don't. I am just giving you the chance to try and discover what is called - or used to be called a sense of

honour. I dare say you belong to a school that puts out it's common and clever little tongue at morals. Well, not morality. Let us call it the code of not hurting people."

"What about - me?"

"Good medicine - on occasions. I am not going to say, my lad, that I have seen more of life than you have, and the ugly side of it. But, believe me, Blore, the cad's creed just doesn't work."

Blore was lathering his chin and staring into the mirror.

"Sure?"

"Becoming more sure - as I grow older. Why not try the other thing?"

"What's the great idea? Wedding bells and all that?"

"That would depend on Joanna."

Blore turned and looked at him.

"You mean you want me to go down there - and - ?"

"I am taking you down."

"Whether - I - ?"

Magnal nodded at him.

"Yes, whether you like it or not. You'll come, and you'll not play any tricks. If I lose my temper again I might kill you."

Blore turned his face again to the mirror.

"Oh, all right, I'll come. But if you think - ."

"We neither of us need think."

"Sort of judgment of Solomon?"

"Exactly."

XXXIII.

Miss Allison looked out of her window and discovered another perfect day, one of those September days that walk up the valleys in a veil of mist, and then suddenly shed the veil and laugh and sparkle. Miss Allison buttoned up her dressing-gown and leaned upon the windowsill. The great hills were grey, and orchard and garden utterly still and tranquil, and Miss Allison thought how pleasant it was to be able to lean out of a window with your hair undone, and your thoughts as calm as the morning.

For, a peculiar calmness had come to Elizabeth Allison, she could not quite say how or why. Life seemed to be like that when you began to understand that words are inadequate, and that all sorts of mysterious things happen in you like all the unseen life that goes on in a wood or a garden. You might make lists, draw maps, and yet in your inspired moments, know that you had but touched the fringe of the unknowable.

So, the Master had gone upon his adventure, like some black bearded Quixote. Poor, dear man, so young and up and doing, did he believe that any good would come of it? Silk purses and sows' ears! Miss Allison raised a hand and smoothed back her hair. She had more than a feeling that things would happen today, inevitable and significant things, but how the tangle would sort itself out was beyond her.

She looked at the orchard. Sunlight was beginning to sift in among the trees, and she could distinguish the little coloured lamps of the ripening fruit. Some were rosy, others pale gold. She heard a robin singing, and then the soft thud of something falling into the grass. An apple, & which meant a maggot, and premature descent from the tree. Had Eve been wise as to moths and maggots? Possibly. & Possibly not.

Miss Allison heard another sound, Bob whimpering outside her door. Bob wanted to be let out. How dependant were dogs and men upon a hand or a pair of hands! Was there any difference between them? Perhaps dogs knew, and men didn't or wouldn't - just how helpless they could be without the hands and the careful house-wise cunning of a woman.

Miss Allison went down and let Bob out, and lit the stove and put the kettle on. Kettles were friendly creatures. They sang a song and blew steam at you. Early morning tea, with plenty of butter on the bread. No doubt Joanna might be comforted by early tea, and Miss Allison filled a cup, placed two slices of bread and butter on a plate and carried the tray upstairs.

"Joanna."

"Yes, Aunt Bess?"

"Early tea, my dear."

Joanna left her bed and opened the door to Miss Allison,

and Joanna's eyes were soft and vaguely frightened. Why should this older woman carry up tea to her? Youth can take so much for granted and assume that beds make themselves, and jam tarts grow out of kitchen tables, but in Joanna ^{the} sour-sweet selfishness of youth was being ~~hastened~~ *challenged*.

"Oh, ^u Aunt Bess, you shouldn't - ."

"Why not, my dear? Slip back into bed."

"Have you had your tea?"

"Not yet."

"Do have it up here with me."

Miss Allison went for her cup and her plate of bread and butter, and placing them on a little table by the window, sat down to listen to the silence, and the voice that would thread words through it, for Joanna's eyes were full of unspilt words.

"Aunt Bess?"

"Yes, my dear."

"Do you think - he - has gone to bring him back?"

"It's possible."

"Oh, - why? ^u Doesn't he understand ^u?"

Miss Allison smiled at the morning.

"He may understand more than you think."

"But I don't - want. Not him - here. ^u You know, Aunt Bess, - I don't think I wanted anything - really. ^u Only just to be myself."

Miss Allison raised her cup and drank. What excellent tea, just right as to sugar and to milk.

"One of the most difficult things in the world, Joanna."

"To be one's self?"

"Why, yes. - And what is one's self? Lots of little selves like spoilt children quarrelling in a nursery."

"But you're not like that."

"Not at the moment. ^u I'm learning to look out of windows. So, you are frightened, my dear."

"Yes ^u."

"Why be frightened? - If the Master comes back with - that."

"Yes, ^u Aunt Bess?"

"Look at it - calmly ^u and let yourself feel what you feel."

"Yes, ^u but - ^u."

"And say what you feel. ^u You may feel so much better - afterwards."

There was silence for some seconds, and Miss Allison heard the dog barking to be let in.

"But - the - other afterwards, Aunt Bess?"

"Don't open doors, my dear, ^u till something barks at them. I'll go down and let Bob in. He wants his biscuits."

Space

Magnal stopped the car on the green way just above the Long Barrow. He sat and looked at the hills, but he did not look at the sulky young man beside him. Hubert Blore had travelled down into Wiltshire like a bowl of sour cream. He had not attempted to spill himself in words or in any scuffle to escape. This large and formidable ~~old~~ ⁱⁿ gentleman was too close and too alert, and for an old man he had driven like Nimshi. Blore had been shocked by his recklessness, and the way Magnal had crowded past other cars and cut his corners. In perilous places Blore went weak in the stomach.

The September sunlight lay softly upon the hills, so that they looked sleek and burnished, yet mysterious as ever. What a lovely land was this in its wildness and its solemnity! Magnal was silent, wondering about the young man at his side. Youth can be so sensitive to beauty, so inspired and uplifted by it, so intoxicated by the sudden consciousness of colour. Had not this little poet fellow any of this lovely freshness, those exquisite heart-searchings that beauty can wring from the spirit? He glanced at that goat-like profile, with one swollen eye half shut. Sallow and sullen, - what! For, Hubert Blore was not attentive to the hills. He was looking straight through the windscreen at the Mistover thorns, and inwardly rehearsing postures and persiflage, and the proper decor for the unpleasant predicament

that was to be staged in that confounded farmhouse. Should he be pert, or play the sentimental penitent?

"Blore."

The young man's head gave a little jerk.

"Yes?"

"Do you see anything in all that, to sober sex and the raw beast in one?"

"In what?"

Magnol looked at him as he might have looked at a man rotten with syphilis.

"If one doesn't see - one just doesn't see. W But you write about beauty, don't you?"

"I w ? Oh, - Lord God Guff, not - the tweaty-weaty
muck!"

"I see. ♫ Baudelaire and all the new nudity."

"I'm just a mammal, ♫ Magnal."

"Perhaps not quite that. - Yet, now one comes to think of it, the whole sex business becomes rather grotesque and ugly with the mammalia. Ever seen a bull mounting a cow? Rather hideous and clumsy. - Well, let's get on." and he pressed the self-starter button.

For, in those few moments under the benediction of the eternal hills Magnal had diagnosed his case, and as the artist in the physician does, partly by intuition.

There was no hope for Joanna in this young man's attitude to life. He belonged to the tribe that would go through a friend's trouser pockets, and seduce his mother's servants, and be pert and bright about it. Magnal was sure that the only meditation Blore was indulging in concerned his eluding of all silly responsibilities, and how best he could sidle out of the trap and stroke his little moustache, and feel that he had been devilish clever about it.

The little rat!

And for some reason known only to himself, Magnal blew loudly on the electric horn.

Joanna ran to the window. She and Miss Allison had been sitting in the parlour rather to the tune of "Women Must Watch, and Women Must Wait". But why? - and not in these days of freedom. If Jove returned in his chariot, bringing with him a little, sneaking Mercury, need dutiful woman accept his Olympian sagacity?

"Oh, ~~h~~ Aunt Bess, he has brought him!"

Miss Allison looked up at Joanna, and at a different Joanna, for during those hours of suspense Joanna's mood had changed. There was a tautness about her, a protest in the set of her pretty head, a glitter in her eyes. ~~W~~ Was she going to be sentimental about the father of her child?

"I won't see him."

Her colour was high. She flashed out of the room, and up the stairs. She locked herself in.

Miss Allison rose with a little smile, and with more deliberation left the room vacant for God and the Ape. Miss Allison was thinking "Oh, yes, you will, my dear. Temper is rising, and that - is all to the good."

Magnal left his car at the gate. He stood for a moment, filling the gateway and blocking Blore out of it, while he looked at this pleasant old house, and at the garden with its autumn flowers. It was good to come back to it, and to the creature-comforts that can console mature man for the loss of more fervid adventures. Well, now to the finale! He turned and looked down upon the father of Joanna's child, and almost he was moved to ironic laughter.

Did he, Modred Magnal, care to compete with - this?

"Come in, A. Blore. It's about tea time."

They had lunched on the way down, and in dreadful silence, like father and son. A. Blore stuffed his hands into his pockets. He had put on his best lounge suit, and somehow it reduced him to a kind of Sabbath nothingness. He might have been some colourless little underling who sat on a stool all day making entries in a ledger.

Magnal led the way up the path, and in the porch he

paused.

"We'll leave the car there. ♣ I can drive you to Blenborough, ♣ if - necessary."

Was there a chuckle at the back of his big throat, and behind that Spanish beard? Blore straightened his shoulders, and when he followed Magnal in, a faint, undulating swagger made his progress appear a waddle.

"In there, ♣ Blore. ♣ I'll see about tea."

Magnal walked down the passage to the kitchen. He found Miss Allison there, in a pensive attitude, watching the kettle, and Magnal's glance considered her. His eyes were wide with a sudden, surprised intelligence. This woman was comforting, so clean, with her white hair and her austere face. ♣ She had quite a pretty profile. ♣ She did not look her age.

"Oh, - Elizabeth."

Miss Allison turned her head, and the austerity seemed to vanish from her face. It had colour. ♣ ~~Her eyes~~ - .

"Can you give us tea?"

"In ten minutes, sir."

"I have brought back our Juan. ♣ Is Joanna - ?"

"In her room, ♣ I think."

They stood and gazed at each other for a second or two, and with a sudden sense of intimate and mutual understanding.

Magnal's black beard seemed to drop. "Now, just what did he see and feel? Good Lord - !

"Will she see him, Elizabeth?"

Miss Allison turned again to the kettle and laid her hand against her cheek as though to screen it, or to conceal it.

"She says - no."

"Does she, by Jove!"

"But I think she will."

There was a pause. Magnal rubbed at his beard.

"I have been a rather phenomenal ass, Elizabeth."

Miss Allison smiled at the kettle.

"I have read - somewhere - that the ass ^{may be} was wiser than the prophet."

Joanna was sitting on her bed, head up, listening. She heard the footsteps mounting the stairs, and in her - as though in time with their rhythm - there jerked in her little flames of anger.

"Joanna."

"Yes."

"The master wants to know if you wish to see - ?"

Joanna was on her feet.

"Yes, I'll see him."

The house seemed very silent as she went downstairs.

Miss Allison had withdrawn into the kitchen and closed the door. Magnal had gone across to the barn, and the dog had followed him. Joanna, very pale, walked slowly to the parlour door and opened it.

Blore was on the hearthrug, nicely posed, with a cigarette between his fingers. He smirked at her. Joanna, grave as death, stood holding the door and looking at him. There was silence. The smirk fell from Blore's face, and then flickered back again. There was a quality in Joanna's gaze that disconcerted him. He stood there, uncomfortably conscious of being appraised and analysed by those dark eyes. Damn it, the girl looked at him as though she disliked him.

"Well, lovely, here we are. - So, what about it?"

Joanna neither moved nor spoke, and in that steadfast stare there was a quality of wonderment. It was as though something shocked her, the utter and strange inadequacy of the creature, astonishment that she should have surrendered to this little goat-faced mannequin. Why, he looked just like any obscure, anonymous cad who might leer at you in the street. She was conscious of anger, anger against herself, and in conjunction with it a cold and biting nausea.

She drew back, head up, drawing the door to after her, and her gaze still held him.

"I just wanted to look at you. * I - have - looked," and with quiet finality she closed the door.

Magnal, returning by way of the orchard after an hour's tactful absence, and passing the sitting-room window, could not refrain from looking in, and the peaceful tableau that he saw astonished him. Miss Allison was seated at one end of the table, Joanna at the other, both with their heads demurely bent upon their sewing. Now, what the devil did this mean? Had Joanna refused to interview the gentleman, and had Miss Allison supported Joanna in her non-consent?

Magnal passed on, and his mood might be described as a puzzled chewing at his beard.

Joanna glanced up for a moment, with a queer and compassionate look.

"I think, Aunt Bess, that he was right - after all."

"Do you, my dear?"

"To shew me - the specimen. * What's that about being wiser than we know?"

"Yes" said Miss Allison, * "things sometimes shape themselves."

Joanna bit off a thread with white young teeth.

"I can't make out how I ever - " but she left the sentence unfinished.

Magnal, passing round the house, saw Hubert Blore leaning in a rather desultory fashion against the garden wall. He was smoking, and staring at nothing in particular. The pose suggested surprised deflation.

"Well, my friend, did she see you?"

Blore did not turn. He blew smoke through his nostrils and gazed into space.

"Yes."

"Any solution, - if I may ask?"

"Oh, she just opened the door, had a look, and shut it again."

"Indeed! Just that!"

Magnal stroked his beard. "What the devil happened next? The solution seemed to be no solution, or rather - Joanna's problem was still a problem.

"Well, " Blore, " I suppose - ."

"You may as well drive me to Blenborough."

"All right," said Magnal, "get in."

XXXIV.

Magnal drove back from Blenborough into the level rays of the descending sun. There was dazzle in them, and the glare upon the windscreen might have been symbolical. Where was he? And what had happened to him in three days? The extraordinary thing was that he felt calmly paternal towards Joanna, and that - somehow - she had ceased to be disturbing.

Exit A Blore, enter - what?

M-yes, the imminence of the creature who - in the vulgar parlance - might be known as "The Little Stranger".

Damn it, A what the devil was to be done about it?

He put the car away, and loitered over the closing of the doors. He was conscious of discomfort, embarrassment. His mind fumbled. There appeared to be no strands of emotion to which he could cling. A Were those two women still sitting at the table, sewing? Almost, he had a feeling that the house was no longer his, and that he was a blundering bull with his hoofs deep in broken china. What a strange, brittle mood was this!

He did not want to meet Joanna. He seemed to lack both the courage and the urge for such a confrontation. He would have to do his best for the girl. - Good Lord, what a phrase, how utterly avuncular and tepid! A fact,

~~how had the sex mania passed from him?~~ Taking the path round the house he came to the sitting-room window, glanced sideways, saw one head, and was past the window in three long and imperative strides. Had the girl seen him?

Poof, ♣ he was feeling hot and bothered. He slewed round the house and in at the porch door, and hesitated between the library and the parlour. He chose the parlour, and found Miss Allison there quietly laying the table. The evening sunlight shone in upon her hair, and her hands did not fumble. Miss Allison had changed her frock. Or had she? It seemed a different frock. It was colourful and pretty. Miss Allison did not look at him. She just went on laying the table.

Magnal drew a deep breath. He was conscious of a profound sense of relief. ♣ This familiar and restful figure! He flopped down into a chair; his back was half turned to Elizabeth Allison. A sudden pleasant sense of relaxation possessed him. ♣ Port after stormy seas! ♣ Gosh, he must be growing old; this adventurous day had tired him. Nice to put your feet up and enjoy a sherry or a gin and bitters.

Silence, not brittle but easy silence. Miss Allison was doing something to the flowers in the vase.

"Well, ♣ that's that, ♣ Elizabeth. So far as it goes."

"You must be feeling tired, sir."

Magnal turned his chair slightly and looked at her. Tired? Yes, by Jove, he was, and it was pleasant to have it noticed.

"Just a bit. * Rather a hectic day, and I lost my temper, Elizabeth, with that young blot."

"Was it worth while, sir?"

"Perhaps, perhaps not. * By the way, Elizabeth, I'd rather prefer you to drop the sir."

"Just as you please."

Miss Allison went to the oak corner cupboard where the drinks lived, and lifted out the sherry decanter, a glass, and a tin of biscuits. She placed them on the table within Magnal's reach. He looked at them attentively for a moment, and a slow smile seemed to gather in his beard.

"Another glass, * Elizabeth. Sit down. We'll take sherry together."

Miss Elizabeth Allison's face was faintly flushed. Could it be due to the sherry, or to the occasion? September nights can be chilly, and she had put a match to the fire. They had a feeling of sharing the fire, and other things. Magnal was drinking his second sherry. How pleasant this was. It seemed to him that Miss Allison's eyes had changed

from grey to a gentle blue, and there was a sparkle in them. Magnal, holding up his glass of sherry, made it an excuse for looking beyond it at Elizabeth. She was different. But what was the difference? She had come alive in some strange way. She had ceased to be impersonal, and she seemed to be aware of it, ~~and to sparkle.~~

"Good sherry, ^A this. ⁺ Real dark stuff. ⁺ Can't stand light sherry. ⁺ ~~It's like baby's - .~~ I beg your pardon, Elizabeth."

Miss Allison bent forward and put a log on the fire.

"And that brings us back to the same problem. ⁺ What are we going to do - with it? ⁺ Personally - I don't like children. Never did. Horrible confession."

Miss Allison sipped her sherry.

"There are quite a number of people who don't like children."

"Rank heresy, ⁺ Elizabeth."

"No, ⁺ honesty. - Only they haven't the courage to say so. ⁺ Humbug and sentiment so often go hand in hand."

Magnal sat up in his chair.

"I say - that's an epigram, Elizabeth. ⁺ What about you?"

"About me?"

"And the child complex."

"I'm afraid my limit is about - half an hour."

"Great Scott, you beat me by ten minutes. Well, what's to be done about it?"

"Won't that be - Joanna's - choice?"

"You mean - ?"

"She may like children, and she may have ideas of her own."

There came a whimpering and a soft scratching at the door, and Miss Allison rose to let the dog in, but Magnal was before her.

"No, sit down, Elizabeth; my job. Come in, my lad, and mind the paint."

Bob, sighting the fire, made for the hearthrug, and lay down like a canine hedonist. After all, when you came to your September, and Bob was not a young dog, hearthrugs and fires and savoury meats in your dish were not to be sniffed at. Magnal, reaching for the sherry decanter, glanced considerably at Bob.

"Yes, wise fellow, rats, rabbits - and - well, never mind. Another glass of sherry, Elizabeth."

"Please, no."

"Please, yes."

Miss Allison fell. She had quite a pretty colour now,

and a veritable sparkle.

Magnal refilled his own glass, sat down, and looked at Miss Allison.

"New frock, ⁴ Elizabeth?"

"No, quite an old one."

"I don't seem to have seen it before. It suits you."

Bob turned his head and looked at Miss Allison, and then turned the other way, and looked up at Magnal. Could dog's wink? Magnal and Bob regarded each other, and it seemed to the man that the dog was laughing at him lovingly.

"Here we are, man, woman and dog, all comfortable together. Good food, good fire, fine hearthrug. No children to pull your tail. No ^{awful} temperamental twists or whimsies. By all the rats and rabbits in Christendom, this is as it should be."

Magnal, head in air, looked down at Bob as though Bob had played the part of Balaam's ass to him.

"Gosh, my lad, you're right," and he added in silence ⁴

"Why didn't I see all this before?"

Joanna sat alone, sewing. Joanna was thinking her own thoughts. ⁴ Where were those two elderly souls? Sitting in conference on her wild indiscretion? Joanna's hands

sank into her lap. She looked out of the window. What did they want of her? It might not be what she might want.

Joanna was different. She was conscious of the thing in her and of the difference. This was not her world. She had vague gropings after other worlds, self-expression, adventure. She had been a shadow here. And she was to be a mother and a person.

XXXV.

Magnal climbed Greenbury, and sitting by the dew-pond, he looked down upon this little world, and found it both the same and different. That the difference was in himself became obvious to him as he reflected upon it, for the super-sensuous can modify the world of the senses. But the problem that puzzled him was not only Joanna's past, present and future, but the domestic situation as it concerned Lammas. What was to be done about it? Without doubt Lammas had witnessed many childbirths, but never so complex a case as this. Joanna's lying-in would have to be at Lammas; he would be compelled to see Dr. Benn of Melfont, explain the lapse, and engage Benn as accoucheur. Damned awkward, - the whole business! And afterwards? Would Lammas have to house a young mother and her infant? Such an addition would raise all sorts of complications. There was Elizabeth to be considered. He could not put more work upon Elizabeth. On the contrary he was visualising Elizabeth Allison in a different guise. She would need help. That meant another woman about the place, and would such a woman be obtainable, and if so she would not be of Miss Allison's status.

Magnal did realise that the laugh was against him, and to his credit he could join - if soberly - in the laughter.

He had run away from life and life had hunted him down and posed him with the eternal and primitive problems. A young sensualist and a prospective infant were to prove more potent than abstract philosophy.

Magnal looked down upon Roman House. No dark-eyed Mediterranean girl would decorate it with an illusion of amorous innocence. Did he desire to continue the dream, not of sex but of rebuilding? Strangely enough he did so desire it. A man's hobby may outlast other obsessions. He still may set to partners, but the particular partner may be different.

Damn it, he would have to prepare for a heart to heart talk with Joanna, but the fact was that he had become scared of Joanna. How chastening was this cowardice! It had been easy to manhandle a thing like Hubert Blore, but to cope with a creature like Joanna was otherwise. The truth seemed to be that youth had shocked him, not in any moral sense, but with its unripeness and its vagaries. What did he know of that dark eyed and vivid young person, her moods and emotions, her secret urges, her inevitable if charming crudities? Just - nothing, or next to nothing. He was in his fiftieth year, and she was seventeen.

"Damn it, ~~we~~ don't funk it, man. Try to find out what she feels about things."

But was that possible? Would she accept him as Father Confessor? Could he play the part of parent, uncle, or big boy friend?

Would it not be better to leave the business to Elizabeth?

He sat and stared at the dewpond.

Its tranquil surface was a mirror, a most mysterious mirror, and every problem that he saw reflected in it seemed to conjure up a particular face. He felt rather like a bewildered small boy, appealing to a nurse.

"Oh, v Elizabeth, what do I do - when - ?"

Good Lord, Elizabeth Allison appeared to have become the inevitable Dea Mater of his world!

But the oracle had to be consulted, and Magnal even propitiated it with the incense of flattery.

"Have you any idea, Elizabeth, what Joanna - wants to do?"

"None - as yet."

"She hasn't spoken to you?"

"No."

How bothered the good man did look! Women may be creatures of guile, even in their devotion, but Miss Allison was seeing her new world taking on shape and colour. She

did not delineate it to Magnal; she was reassuring and serene.

"I know I ought to have a heart to heart talk with her, # but the fact is - Elizabeth - I find I'm scared stiff."

"Youth can be very disconcerting."

"By Jove, yes. ♣ It hasn't the manners of the more mature. One feels oneself floundering. ♣ Of course - I ought to see Benn of Melfort about her."

"Need you?"

"Well, ♣ one will have to make some arrangements."

"Couldn't I do it?"

"Would you, ♣ Elizabeth? ♣ That's terribly kind of you."

"It might be easier for me."

Poor dear man - his relief was so evident! He might be capable of thrashing a cad, but when it came to following the Ariadne thread of a young girl's potentialities he fumbled and felt lost.

"Well, ♣ will you suggest it, ♣ Elizabeth?"

"I will."

Miss Allison rose, and then turned aside to glance into the flower vase to see whether it needed more water. It did not. She stood hesitant, but not because she felt so.

"It has just occurred to me - ."

"What, ♣ Elizabeth?"

"It might be - rather useful if I could drive a car.
It would save you 4."

"By Jove, 4 Elizabeth, 4 that's an idea. 4 I could
get you some lessons. 4 Or - I could teach you myself."

"I would rather you taught me, 4 if you have the time.
One is apt to be self-conscious with strangers."

The tuition began that self-same day. Magnal ran the car out into the yard, and with Elizabeth in the driver's seat he gave her a practical demonstration of the controls. Bob had joined them, and the dog sat in the back seat with an air of great wisdom, and of being ready to prompt Magnal should words fail him. Joanna, happening to look out of her bedroom window, discovered this most significant scene, and bit a reflective finger over it. Man, woman and dog were absorbed in this most serious business, a characteristic trio, and all of an age together. Joanna both smiled and frowned over her appreciation of this significant lesson. Maybe, there were twinges of jealousy in her, but not of the sombre sort that make for tragedy. Joanna was seven leagues distant from the Joanna of the month of May. There was a restiveness in her, a sudden and secret wilfulness, an urge that was self-creative. Joanna in Lamma was new wine in an old skin.

She put a hat on, glanced at her figure in the mirror, took her vanity-bag, a present from Magnal, and explored it with deliberate fingers. Yes, she had two pound notes and some silver, more than enough for the business in hand. She left Lammas just ten minutes before Magnal drove the car and Miss Allison out into the green way and along it to the old road. Elizabeth was to try her hand at steering on bottom gear. They were so absorbed in the adventure that they did not see the distant figure on the road to Melfont.

For the third time Miss Allison let in the clutch too abruptly, and stopped an engine that was being starved of gas.

"How stupid of me! Really - ."

"We all do it, Elizabeth. Take your time, Clutch in gently, throttle open. That's it, right foot down."

The car moved, and Miss Allison clutched the steering wheel.

"I'm sure I can't steer - ."

"Yes you can."

"Oh, we're going - ."

Magnal put a big hand on the wheel and brought the car back from dangerous proximity to the ditch.

"That's all right."

"Don't leave go - yet."

"Not for a moment. 47 Take it easy. 48 I'm here, you know."

Miss Allison was flushed and a little breathless.

"Now - let me try again."

"All right."

The car crawled cautiously along the crown of the old, grass-grown road.

"That's it, my dear. You are doing famously."

Not till tea-time did they discover the absence of Joanna. Miss Allison had carried in Magnal's tray, and had returned to the kitchen to get her own and Joanna's tea when it occurred to her to wonder where the girl was. Elizabeth Allison had not quite recovered from the secret breathlessness of the afternoon's adventure, and of being "my deared" by her god and master. She had forgotten all about Joanna and Joanna's moods and pregnant silences. Miss Allison went out, into the passage and called softly up the stairs. She was feeling gentle towards Joanna.

"Jo, 49 are you there?"

She received no answer, and going up to explore, found the girl's room empty. Oh, 50 well, perhaps Joanna had gone out and mislaid her sense of time. Young things were apt to be casual about the clock. Miss Allison returned to her

own tea. She was in a listening mood, yet she was not listening for the mere footsteps of a girl, but to the vibrations of a voice, and the wonderful words it had uttered.

He had called her "My dear!".

It must be confessed that Miss Allison went to her room and indulged in mysterious ritual before her mirror before going down to clear away the master's tea. He was very much at his ease, and smoking a pipe, and reflecting upon certain realities that were comforting and suggestive. He glanced up at Elizabeth, and Miss Allison was ready to be looked at.

"Another lesson tomorrow, Elizabeth. By the way, you'll have to get a licence."

Miss Allison smiled at the tea-table.

"Yes, I shall. I hope I shan't be so stupid next time."

"I don't think the word applies, Elizabeth. By the way, where's the girl?"

"She must have gone out and forgotten the time."

"Young things do. I must be getting old, for like Bob I like my biscuits on the tick of the clock."

Miss Allison said quietly "I don't think you will ever be old."

Five o'clock, and still no Joanna.

Magnal was in the orchard, apple picking, for the year had given them a heavy crop, and a part of the old stone granary had been turned into a store. Magnal had cleared some of the younger trees, and was tackling one of the veterans, a nameless breed, but buxom with blushing fruit, and he was well up the ladder when Miss Allison came out to him.

"No Joanna - yet."

"Hasn't she been in for tea?"

"No."

Magnal looked down through the leaves at Elizabeth's upturned face. Their eyes met in a question.

"She can't have done that?"

"You mean - ?"

"Gone off to that young blackguard."

Miss Allison looked worried. Her conscience was telling her that she had not given enough thought to Joanna.

"Surely - not. I think she had - ."

"But - supposing she has just - gone?"

"She couldn't do that."

"I wonder!"

Magnal unhooked his basket from the bough where it hung,

and came down the ladder.

"I'd better do a little scouting. † One ought to remember, Elizabeth, † that a girl - in her - ."

There was no need for him to indulge in detail, for Miss Allison understood him, and he was shy of too much realism, for, at times, nature can be crude and repellent, when the taint of the slug is on the flower. Miss Allison had a hand to her cheek. There were other anxieties and preoccupations in the sidelong glance she gave him.

Magnal put his basket of apples away and wandered up to the chapel. Why - the chapel? He could not say. All that he knew was that the strange spell of this wild country had returned, and that the face of Joanna haunted him. A child singing in Witch's Wood, a girl kneeling with him by Roman House, Melisande and the Greenbury water. There was a sudden poignancy in these memories, a tenderness that was bitter-sweet, ~~a tremor of anguish~~. Was it that he had felt life slipping away from him, and had he discovered in the face of youth a last passionate provocation? O, ye gods, was the old man's foolishness suddenly reviving in him, blowing creature comforts to shreds, and tantalising him with the sunset of illusion?

He found the chapel door locked, and the key hanging

by the door. So, Joanna could not be there. A hanging key! He stood and stared at it, for the thing roused in him a sudden association of ideas. What panic thought was this? Could he and Elizabeth have been blind to the mute despair of a girl who was but a child? What had been passing in Joanna's mind? Good God, she couldn't have - !

Magnal glanced at his watch. Five minutes to six. In an hour it would be growing dark. The girl must be found before night-fall. He was more than troubled while telling himself that this fear might be mere foolishness. Yet strange, unhappy things could happen at moments such as this.

He went striding back to Lammas and into the old rick-yard. He shouted "Joanna, Joanna, are you here?" Miss Allison, at work in the kitchen, heard him calling, and stood rigid. Almost, the voice was that of man calling to his mate. Surely, oh - surely, the madness had not returned! She heard his voice in the walled garden and then in the orchard. "Joanna, Joanna." It faded out into the distance, like some voice "off stage". He was out in the green way and passing between the thickets and the old cottages to the open country. The voice died away, but Elizabeth Allison still seemed to hear it.

"Joanna, - Joanna!"

And within her another voice cried "If it should happen it will be a judgement upon you."

So, Magnal came to the open country, and shading his eyes with his hand, looked towards the Long Barrow, and Bareacres and Five Barrow Down. The sunlight was dazzling from the west, and turning from it he scanned the country on his left where the level rays helped him, but he saw nothing. Had the girl gone from there, or was she - ? Some fierce impulse sent him down towards the Long Barrow. It was there that she and Blore - . ♣ But he did not wish to remember that evening in May, ~~when the anguish of sex had mocked him.~~ ♣ He came to the Long Barrow, climbed it, stood still. ♣ He saw her below, sitting there upon the grass bank, her hands clasped about her knees, her face turned to the setting sun.

"Joanna!"

Her chin flicked round. She looked at him in a strange way, almost as though she resented being surprised here.

"Hallo."

Her voice was casual, and her hands remained clasped about her knees.

"My dear, ♣ we have been worried about you."

"Oh! ♣ Why?"

Magnal felt like a man who had been winded by a blow.

How youth could deflate you!

"Well, we wondered where you had got to."

She turned her face away and looked at the setting sun.

"I just walked to Melfont."

"Melfont!"

"Yes, I thought I ought to see Dr. Benn. - I saw him."

Almost, Magnal gasped. - Good God, had he been playing Hamlet to an Ophelia who seemed as cool and silky as iced wine?

"Do you mean to say you went to see Benn - about - ?"

"Yes."

"All by yourself?"

"Why not?"

XXXVI.

Magnal could not answer that question. He did not attempt to answer it. "By all the prophets - youth had assumed a cool competence that put him among the Balaams. "Why not?" - Yes, why not? He might have been some ignorant old gaffer whom the young schoolmistress with her French and her algebra and her dabbings in the new psychology might pertly dismiss as a village oddity.

He was angry, astonished, silent. He had allowed emotion to run away with him, and this child had sobered him with a suddenness that was flabbergasting. Almost, she might have said to him "Pull yourself together, you poor old dear."

Assuredly, he was a very ignorant creature, so far as youth was concerned. Was it that this child had become very much a person, passionately yet calmly individual, and determined to be herself? It might be that she was as ready to run from Lammas as she had been to run from the Orphanage five years ago. She had grown up and out of an environment. No longer was she his Joanna, but her own Joanna, and resolutely so.

He put his hands in his pockets. He looked at the setting sun. Irrefutable symbol! He said, and the words sounded tame to him.

"Well, my dear, hadn't we better be getting home?"

For a few seconds she remained motionless. Then, she unclasped her hands, and ^{now} rose, ~~and~~ began to climb the steep bank of the barrow. Magnal's impulse was to put out a hand to help her, but he refrained. Her eyes seemed to look at everything but at him.

So, they descended the further slope, and walking well apart, held towards Lemmas. Magnal was between her and the sun, and his shadow fell across her. Absit omen! He shifted his position so that her slighter and shorter shadow was on him.

"Tired, Joanna?"

"Not a bit."

"Rather a long walk, for - ."

She gave him one quick, sidelong glance. Almost, it was like a hand warding off too intimate an approach. Good Lord, did she resent sympathy? They strolled on in silence until they were within a few yards of the Mistover thorns, and then a sudden sense of exasperation made Magnal break the silence.

"Am I permitted to know what Dr. Benn - ?"

She did not answer him for a moment. Her dark eyes were gazing straight ahead.

"Everything's quite normal."

Magnal felt like chewing his beard. Quite normal! *

Well, of all the cool, self-contained - ! What, in the names of all the Seraphs had become of the Joanna of yesterday, his Joanna? But wasn't she insisting upon his realising that she was not his Joanna, but very much someone else?

All that he could say was "Well, - I'm glad of that."

He stood aside to let her enter the Lammas porch. Would she turn just for one moment, and look at him even with a ghost glance out of the past? She did not, but walked in and along the passage to the stairs. She disappeared. He had followed her in. He heard her footsteps go deliberately and firmly up the stairs, and the closing of her door. She turned the key, and the faint click was audible to him.

What a gesture! He rubbed his beard. So, she had turned the key against him, and the inference was that she was denying her elders the right to interfere.

"Well, I give it up," thought Magnal, but there was a savage irk in him that creaked like a shutter in the wind.

Miss Allison was sitting by the window, sewing, and though the light was fading she had need of hands that were occupied. She had heard his footsteps follow Joanna into the house, and the very silence of their home-coming had

chilled her with it's suggestion of significant stealth. What had happened between them? When a man and a girl came so silently into a house, and the girl went straight to her room, what was the obvious inference? Miss Allison persevered with her sewing, though her hands were trembling, and it was obvious that she was making a cobbled caricature of the job.

Oh, ~~h~~ this silence! Why didn't he move? ~~h~~ Why was he standing there out in the passage? ~~h~~ So, he must have something to tell her, something that would not be easy to tell. Miss Allison began counting her stitches, like a clock ticking out the tense seconds.

"Elizabeth."

She gave a start, and her hands sank into her lap. His voice was not the voice of a man who had a secret to conceal, or not that kind of secret. ~~h~~ He wanted her.

"Yes ~~h~~ ."

"Come into the parlour for a moment."

She heard his footsteps pass down the passage. She put her work aside, rose, and still shaking in knees and soul, walked slowly down the passage. What did he want of her? "Do not be a fool, Elizabeth Allison, and tremble like some idiot girl with sentimental illusions!"

"Shut the door, Elizabeth."

He was the man on the hearthrug, lord and master of

the house, but he showed her his face and not his back, and that, to Elizabeth Allison, was evidential.

"Sit down, my dear."

The trembling seemed to go out of her. There can be intense discomfort in a rigidity that is also tremulous. She felt herself relax, and suddenly she saw that he was smiling, both at her and at himself.

"Unnecessary agitation, Elizabeth. " By Jove, these young things can give one shocks. " Where do you think the child had been?"

Miss Allison gave a little shrug, and shook her head.

"To - Melfont."

"All that way - on foot? " How - reckless!"

"Well, there seems to have been reason in her recklessness. Whom do you think she went to see?"

"Not that young man!"

"Oh, " no, nothing so - romantic. " Just - Dr. Benn."

"Dr. Benn!"

"Yes, for examination and report."

"Did she tell you - ?"

"Well, " obviously, Elizabeth. " Rather flabbergasting. When I got my breath and asked her to, - she just said "Everything is quite normal'."

Miss Allison's hands were folded in her lap. She sat

and gazed at them.

"Was that - all?"

"Very much all. I had not the affrontery to pursue the subjects further. * The inference seems to be that Joanna has a world of her own to walk in. * What it is - we are not allowed to know. * But that still leaves one with a dreadful sense of responsibility."

Miss Allison clasped and unclasped her hands.

"Yes, - that's so, * but - ."

"If only the child would talk. * One doesn't want to impose a plan, * but to ^{help} assist. * What I mean is - Elizabeth, * if she asks for a life of her own, a show of her own, * I shall only be too ready to help her to it. * One could make her an - allowance."

Miss Allison looked up at him with sudden directness.

"She may want to leave us."

"Exactly."

"And - find - ?"

"Oh, * adventure - I suppose, a path in her own world. She has * ability, * you know. * Do you think you could get her to talk?"

"I'll try," said Elizabeth Allison.

Joanna came downstairs. She had changed into her working frock and put on an apron.

"Have you laid his table, Aunt Bess?"

"No, my dear."

"All right. My job."

Miss Allison was frying bacon and eggs, one of the master's particular fancies, and so reassuring and English. A pleasant sizzling rose from the pan. It was an emotional moment in the life of bacon and eggs, but Elizabeth Allison, turning a mature wisdom in this other crisis, retained her hold upon the situation.

"Not too tired?"

"Not a bit."

Miss Allison did not make the mistake of proffering sympathy on a hot plate. Her intuitions were at work upon Joanna's temperament. Was not Joanna's mood one of healthy realism, a revolt against humbug and tweety-weety. Almost, Miss Allison could hear Joanna saying - "Oh, cut out the sob stuff. I'm a healthy young woman and I'm going to have a child. * It was my slip and my responsibility, if you can call giving way to nature a slip. I'm not 'Vicky', I'm modern. I know there are going to be problems, but they are - my - problems."

Miss Allison turned the rashers.

"Oh, - Joanna."

Joanna paused with the tray.

"Yes."

"I'm glad you saw Dr. Benn. So sensible. ♣ Yes - he - told me."

Joanna's chin went up.

"Well, ♣ I don't want - the Magdalene stuff."

"Of course not, my dear. Who is offering it to you? ♣
But there are times when a friend can help. Not goody-goody. You've got your own life to live, ♣ not here - perhaps, but where you may choose to live it. ♣ Try and realise that - I - understand that."

Joanna hesitated. Her defiance softened. She came back and across, and holding the tray to one side, kissed Miss Allison on the cheek.

"Thanks, ♣ Aunt Bess. ♣ That's sporting of you. ♣
I might talk - if - ."

"Yes, dear?"

"If - he - doesn't want to play the heavy father. I know I owe him a lot, ♣ but owing things may be rather beastly."

Magnal was in the library, but hearing someone moving

in the parlour, and taking it to be Elizabeth, he passed out and in and came face to face with Joanna. Joanna was wearing her apron, and an air of domestic service. She was in the act of placing a spoon on the table, and she appeared to concentrate upon that simple act, and to present to Magnal nothing but a dutiful and detached surface.

Magnal fumbled, and then blurted out the obvious.

"Getting on with the job, Joanna."

"Yes, sir. * Shall I be disturbing you?"

"Not in the least. * Have you seen "Haverfield" lying about anywhere?"

"No, sir, * I'm afraid not."

"No matter," and Magnal shambled out, minus a hypothetical book, and any comprehension of this very formal impact.

Nor did Elizabeth Allison make any further move towards the tempting of confidences. If Joanna wished to talk, let the initiation come from her, and apparently Joanna did so wish, and opened herself with curious candour to Miss Allison.

"Do you think I could have the baby here?"

"Where else, my dear? This has been your home."

Joanna helped herself to butter.

"It was. * But it isn't any longer. * I have

reasons. They might seem funny to you, and if you don't mind I'd rather not - ."

"Your reasons are your own, Joanna."

"I'm glad you realise that. + I don't think he ever would. * No, don't interrupt, please. - Everything seemed different - after. * Did you ever have a child?"

"No, my dear."

"It's strange, but I don't know how I shall feel about it, whether I shall hate it or love it. - You see, somehow - I don't want to be a mother. * I want to be free - and myself."

Miss Allison was silent for some seconds.

"That's not easy, Joanna."

"I know, and I shan't know - until the thing is born. I may want it and I may not, * but I want to find things out for myself, not have them * spoon-fed to me."

"So, it rather depends - ?"

"Yes, * on how I feel. * You see - life ought to be one's own. * I want to find out for myself, do things. I'm young, not - ."

She hesitated and glanced quickly at Miss Allison, but Miss Allison's eyes were on her plate. How nearly had she blurted out "I'm not old like you.". But Elizabeth had not missed the point, and could smile over it in secret. Youth

and middle age sometimes set to partners, and the old became young, and the young hard and brittle.

"Tell me, my dear, you used to be happy here?"

"Oh, ⁴ yes, ⁴ in a vague sort of way. ⁴ I wasn't grown up."

"No. ⁴ But you were interested in - his work?"

"I suppose I was. ⁴ I liked - the illustrating. ⁴ But, you see, he's interested in dead old things. - I want to be an artist, and I shan't want to paint dead old things. ⁴ I belong to the world that is and will be."

Miss Allison poured herself out a second cup of coffee, and was tempted to take an extra lump of sugar. Yes, obviously, Joanna was not Lammas, and never would be Lammas. She was legitimate April at its crudest, not soft, serene September.

"You have every right to your choice, my dear, but there is one thing you don't seem to realise."

"What's that?"

"That though he may be interested in what you call the dead old things - he is ready to help you realise the live ones."

Joanna seemed to ponder those words.

"Well, ⁴ that's sporting of him, Aunt Bess, ⁴ because, ⁴ oh - well, he might have - ."

"Might have * ?"

"Perhaps I oughtn't to say it, " but I think he was getting rather silly about me. † That's between ourselves."

"Quite so," said Miss Allison. "I don't think you need worry further - about that."

Miss Allison had the poison in the cup, had she cared to use it, but use it she did not, even as a cooling draft to settle the emotions. She sat up that evening until Joanna had gone to bed, and then she walked down the passage and knocked at the parlour door.

"Come in. - Oh, it's you, Elizabeth. Any news?"

"Yes."

"Sit down and tell me."

But he got up and pushed a chair nearer to the fire. She had seen his face smooth itself out after glancing at the opening door. He had feared youth, and found maturity more welcome.

"Well, † my dear?"

"She wonders whether you would let her have the child born here."

"And after - that?"

"She wants to leave us - and live her own life. Her idea - is - art."

"Well, * I suppose that could be arranged. † But what about the - little stranger?"

"She doesn't seem very interested in it. * I suppose it will have to be - ."

Magnal sat up sharply in his chair.

"No, * I'm damned if I am going to have this house turned into a creche. She will have to find a home for the brat. It's her responsibility. * Besides, * Elizabeth - ."

He leaned forward to poke the fire.

"Things must be different here. * You have given me peace and comfort, and I want you - to share it. * Changes, yes. We shall have to do some building."

"Building?"

"You are going to have help, my dear. † Well, not exactly that. * What I mean is - maids. † I suppose you could get a couple of women."

Miss Allison gazed at the fire.

"You would like me to act as housekeeper?"

"Well, call it that - for the moment."

XXXVII.

Man, in his urge to create order out of the seeming chaos of circumstance, or ~~at least~~ to discover some thread which will lead him through the maze, may be most vulnerable when he is feeling most secure. He may have lit his fire in the mouth of the cave, and stretched himself to sleep upon his bed of dry grasses and of skins. ~~Let~~ wild beasts prowl; the sacred fire will guard him while he sleeps. So, in a sense, ~~Modred~~ Magnal and Elizabeth Allison went to sleep and let nature take its course. Lammas should remain as it was until Joanna had born her child, and gone forth into the world. The leaves were falling and winter was coming in, and youth went about its duties with a young and silent dignity. Almost a benign normality seemed to possess the house. The days were windless and calm, the valleys misty, the hills aloof. And if there was an air of aloofness about Joanna, her elders accepted it as the prerogative of youth, youth that was preparing to pass out of their lives into a little, mysterious world of its own.

Yet, neither Magnal nor Miss Allison gave sufficient thought to the ~~incalculable waywardness of Psyche~~, nor to the possibility of tragic happenings. In a sense - Magnal had abrogated his manhood. ~~Had he analysed the inwardness of self he might have discovered a little secret wound of~~

~~pique, a frustration that had caused him to shrug his~~
~~shoulders, settle into an easy chair and put his feet up.~~
 Comfort, relaxation, the fruit ripe on the bough, no green
 apples ~~and no organic anguish in your belly.~~ The Lord be
 thanked he had escaped from playing the fool at fifty. He
 had taken a nice clean sponge and wiped things out. He sat
 solidly upon a secret and insurgent self. Peace, & peace,
 good food, a perfect bed, interesting work to do, a ~~complacent~~
 woman who studied a fellow's whims and habits. It was the
 dead season of the year; squirrels had stored their nuts,
 dormice gone to sleep, the corn was in the stack or in the
 granary, the solitary hills ^{are} crowned with the clouds.

Magnal was back in his comfortable groove. Not again would
 nature cause him to bolt like a startled rabbit. He did not
 feel things, perhaps because he had drugged himself with a
 pleasant sense of otiose resignation. He went up to Roman
 House, and potted about, dug, sifted soil, cleaned up his
 finds, made notes. Roman House was to be Roman House,
 Joanna or no Joanna. The monumental work should be completed,
 and if he needed feminine applause, * Elizabeth Allison might
 bring to the accomplishment a mature and tranquil co-operation.

It was on a dead dim day in January ^{at 10-} when Miss Allison came downstairs with the news. There had been a feeling of unrest in the old house, a kind of premonition that had permeated it like those primitive happenings which seem to walk like spirits and cause boards to creak under ghostly feet.

"I think - Dr. Benn - and the nurse are needed."

Magnal had lunched and had his slippered feet up in front of a roasting fire. He was reading some of his latest notes on Roman House, and Miss Allison's soft voice plucked him out of the past into the present.

"What? - So - soon?"

"I have put her to bed."

Magnal lowered his feet from the tuffet.

"Oh - well, I had better drive over and get Benn. He will know."

It did occur to Magnal as he ran the car out that the physician in him was strangely dead. He would have shirked this issue, shrunk from it. A rather nauseating business at the best of times, and in Joanna's case - ! Somehow he did not want to contemplate it, ~~that slim body in anguish, and contracting to expel a little piece of primitive flesh that was half part Hubert Blore.~~ Magnal tried to efface any feeling about it, but the feeling was there, like a wound, but lightly skinned over. And so he ^{drew} ~~drawn~~ through that

familiar country that was strange and dim and distant on this winter day. Oh, - well, Benn knew all about it, even in its unseemly if romantic aspect, and it was Benn's affair. A capable person - Benn, and no ethical prig. Unmarried mothers were not rarities in such a place as Melfont St. Giles.

By a lucky chance Magnal met Benn's car coming out of Melfont on its afternoon round, and Magnal waved and hooted and pulled to the side of the road. He looked in his mirror and saw that Benn had caught his signal and was stopping. Magnal opened the door and got out, and strolled back to meet the doctor. He found himself trying to feel and to appear casual. Benn was alone, for his chauffeur was down with flu.

"Hallo, Benn. Sorry, but I'm afraid we've got to drag you over to our place."

"The Foster child?"

"Yes. Premonitory pains - it seems. Miss Allison has put her to bed."

"Well, I was coming out to Bareaacres."

"Good, so it won't be so much out of your way. I suppose you don't contemplate anything abnormal?"

"The girl has rather a small pelvis, but she's healthy. How's the - mentality?"

"She seems quite resigned to it. A dirty business.

I should like to have broken the young cad's neck."

"I dare say you would. * In some of these cases - the emotions - . Yes, but of course you know that. 4 I'll come straight on from Bareacres."

"Thanks, Benn. 5 What about the nurse?"

"That's rather a complication. Our "local" is laid up. I'm afraid we shall have to manage without one, at least for a day or two. I'll phone Blenborough when I get back."

"I could collect a nurse from there."

"So you could. 6 I'll give you the address and a note."

Benn got back into his car and scribbled on a writing pad.

"There you are."

"Thanks - muchly. 7 By the way, Benn, full fees, you know, 8 on the Lammas scale."

"Oh, we won't worry about that."

"My dear man, 9 I beg your pardon, but we will."

They parted, Benn going on to Bareacres where John Wise was down with acute lumbago, and Magnal to Blenborough. What a strange business was this, the accouchement of the frightened child whom he had found singing in Witch's Wood!

Magnal's luck was out, so far as a nurse was concerned. The particular person was engaged on a case, and one that could not be left, so Magnal drove back to Mistover. Dusk was falling, and the familiar house seemed suddenly strange to him, the front windows unlit and cold. The Dark House! Did houses know and feel all that happened or might happen in them? Magnal had switched on the headlights and their beams swept walls and thorns and grey old buildings and ended in a glare upon the whitewashed interior of the garage. Magnal turned off the lights, and closed the doors, and walked across the great yard towards the house. He saw a light behind the blind of a particular window, Joanna's window. "Well, Elizabeth would have to deputise for the nurse. Poor Elizabeth, life was for ever making a Martha of her when she might be a Mary.

Magnal let himself in by the backway, and was taking off his coat in the passage when a little sound drifted to him from the room above. A gentle moaning. It sent a pang through him. It hurt. It had for him an almost sinister poignancy. Oh, "damn Blore, damn nature, damn everything! He hung up his hat and coat and turning into the fire-lit parlour, switched on the light. A sumptuous fire was burning, and his tea was laid. "Well, well, that

was normality in the midst of discord. "That was Elizabeth, thoughtful and unfailing as ever."

A door opened above, and for a moment that little complaining sound became more audible. Elizabeth Allison came to the head of the stairs.

"Is that - you, sir?"

Magnal turned back into the passage.

"Yes, Elizabeth. No luck, the nurse is out on another case."

"I can manage."

"God bless you, - Elizabeth. What a woman you are!"

"I have laid your tea, and the kettle is on. - I ought to stay - ."

"Have you had your tea?"

"No."

"Well, I'll bring you up some and put it outside the door."

Space

Dr. Benn returned to Tammas about nine o'clock, and having examined the case, resigned himself with philosophical weariness to a night on duty. He joined Magnal before the parlour fire, and produced a pipe and accepted a whisky and soda.

"A nuisance about the nurse. - I don't like leaving the girl. For a primip. it promises to be speedy."

"We can give you a shake-down on the sofa."

"Thanks, & Magnal, & I won't quarrel with it. & A man must sleep when he is doing fourteen hours a day. & That's a most comforting woman - your Miss Allison."

"You're right, my friend. She is."

At ten o'clock Magnal left Benn upon the parlour sofa, and went to his own room. He undressed and got into bed, and turned out the light. Never had he felt more sleepless, more like a stranger in this house of his. He lay still and found himself listening, and to him came those sounds of spasm and of pain, a vague sense of movement, the creaking of boards, a little, distant consoling voice. That was Elizabeth Allison. & Damn it, - how could he sleep, or rest? He turned on the light, - ~~Damn Blane, damn nature!~~

He picked up a book from the bed-table and tried to read, but those primitive sounds seemed to get themselves mixed up with the letter-press.

A cry, & words - ^{scarcely} ~~hardly~~ heard, but eloquent and poignant - if worldless.

"Aunt Bess, - I can't bear it."

~~"Aunt Bess, will it be long?"~~

A door would open and shut. It was always opening and shutting. ~~Means,~~ & Creakings, sounds of stress! Damn it, & he could not lie there and listen. He could not stay in this house. He got up, dressed himself, sneaked like a coward down the stairs, reached for a ghostly hat and coat, and softly let himself out into the night. It was a dead night, calamitously dark and still. He fumbled his way to the gate and out into the green way, and down it to the open country. Not a star, not a sound, not a breath of wind. What an ominous night for any live thing to be born.

Joanna's child, a boy, was still-born about four o'clock in the morning.

Magnal, sitting before the parlour fire, heard Benn descending the stairs. Magnal waited, staring at the fire.

"All - over?"

Benn came to the fire with the face of a man who was very weary.

"Yes, & dead."

"Dead!"

"A monstrosity, no top to the cranium. ¶ I thought there was something funny - when - ."

Magnal sat staring.

"And - the mother?"

"All right."

"Does she know ¶ ?"

"That it was dead, ¶ yes; not the other thing."

Magnal was both shocked and challenged by this finale. The child was dead, ¶ Joanna free. The incubus that was part Blore had been born a monstrosity. What a trick for Nature to play!

And what now?

Magnal, like a man absorbed in some abstruse problem, found himself collecting the whisky decanter and a syphon. Glasses, yes. Benn needed a drink, and so did he.

"Half and half, ¶ Benn?"

He became aware of Benn's voice saying something about bread and cheese, and no drinks on an empty stomach, and having to drive home in the dark along that derelict road. Yes, of course, Benn was hungry. Magnal went and rummaged in pantry and larder, and returned with half a Stilton, butter, bread, knives and plates. Benn had lit a cigarette, and was

squatting on the tuffet before the fire. Magnal placed the tray upon the table, and reached for the whisky decanter.

"Help yourself, A Benn."

The doctor turned his head, A but did not move from his perch.

"Oh, A by the way, Magnal, I - christened the thing. One does, - you know."

"Of course."

"It will have to be A put away. A Can you manage it?"

Magnal stood rigid, A holding glass and decanter.

"I? - Oh, - well, of course, A someone will have to - . Yes, in the chapel curtilage. A I - I'll read the burial service over it."

Benn rose and came to the table, and cut himself a slice of bread and a chunk of cheese. He had the weary and shut-up look of a man who did not want any more problems put to him.

"Did she choose the - thing's - name?"

Benn frowned.

"Yes. A Does that - ?"

"Well, A even that poor little bit of deformity A somehow deserves a label. If I have to - ."

Benn raised his glass and drank.

"Well, - if you must know," and he gulped and spluttered,
for the whisky was a strong one, "she chose - the dog's name."

"Bob?"

"Yes."

XXXVIII.

In the grey of the dawn Magnal received from Elizabeth Allison's hands a little blanketed bundle. Elizabeth Allison's face was as grey as the dawn, and her eyes seemed to have sunk into her head. Magnal did not look at the bundle; his glance was for Elizabeth.

"Go and lie down and get some sleep, Elizabeth. You are tired to death."

She smiled faintly at the thing he held.

"Yes, - I'll try. Did the doctor tell you?"

"Yes."

Miss Allison put a hand to her forehead and smoothed back her hair.

"I think I'll make myself some tea - before - ."

"No you won't, Elizabeth. I'll do that. You get to bed for a while. How's - Joanna?"

"Asleep."

"Good. How did she take - the thing?"

Miss Allison leaned against the wall, with eyes that seemed to be closing.

"Oh, rather strangely. A kind of torpor, almost sullen. At present I'm too tired - ."

"For other people's problems. Off you go, my dear."

I'll bring you up some breakfast."

Magnal found himself in the parlour holding that bundle. What should he do with it for the time being? There was an old oak coffin-stool in the corner, and Magnal laid his bundle there, to find that Bob had sidled in. The dog sniffed at the bundle.

"Get out - old man."

He drove the dog out of the room and shut the door, and went into the kitchen. Bob followed him, puzzled and reproachful. "After all, master, I only sniffed at the funny thing. What is it?" Magnal relented. He filled Bob's biscuit dish, and put the kettle on and found a tray. Somehow he was consoled and steadied by the simple service he was performing. Pretty china, two boiled eggs, bread, butter and marmalade for Elizabeth Allison.

What the devil had persuaded the girl to give that still-born monstrosity the dog's name? Did Elizabeth know?

Of course she knew. With a careful frown on his face he carried the tray upstairs.

He knocked at Miss Allison's door.

"Breakfast, Elizabeth. May I come in?"

"Come in."

Elizabeth was sitting up in bed, wearing a lace cap. She looked very plain, poor dear, and conscious of it, but Magnal did not see her like that.

"Now - you put that away, my dear, and then have a good sleep. I shall be about."

He slid the tray onto the bed, smiled at Elizabeth, and then gently patted her cheek.

"You've been a saint."

Then, sudden embarrassment seized him. He got out of the room and down the stairs, feeling that he had not said all that he might have said, and Miss Allison reached tremulously for the teapot, and tears ran down her cheeks. "Why, oh - why? And what would happen now? She felt too tired to face up to the possibilities."

Magnal went to the toolshed for a spade. It was one of those grey, grim days when daylight seems hardly daylight, dry yet misty, with a faint drift of cold air from the north. A muffled stillness prevailed. The dim hills seemed to be part of the dim sky.

With the spade over his shoulder and the bundle under one arm he walked up the green way to the chapel. It was as grey as the hills and the sky. Even the turf looked grey on this January morning. Magnal put down the bundle, and he was glad to be rid of it, for his live flesh had shrunk from the flabby pressure of that dead thing. He dug a grave, three feet by one foot, choosing a spot where the

sod seemed virgin. He had become something of an expert with a spade, and he shaped the sides of his little trench with a craftsman's precision. Nine inches of loam, and then chalk. He spaded out the white stuff until his grave was two feet deep.

Then he stood and paused and looked at the bundle. Was it quite decent to bury the creature as it was? Did not even a monstrosity deserve a coffin? But what? He walked back to Lammass, cogitating. Yes, there was that old oak bible-box in the shed; it had been exiled to the shed because it was seriously and actively worm-eaten. He collected the bible-box, carried it back, slipped the small bundle into it, and lowered the improvised coffin into the grave.

No, he had not desire to see Joanna's child in the flesh. Rather a nauseating business - this! But he knelt on one knee and scattered some soil onto the top of the box, and repeated a few words from the ritual for the burial of the dead.

"Earth to earth - "

Poor little monstrosity! What a waste of time and tissue? Would Joanna grieve? Maybe, the release would be a relief to her.

He rose and spaded the chalk and the soil gently into the grave, shaped a small mound, and covered it with turf.

No, & there would be no cross or headstone here with "Bob Foster" carved upon it.

Elizabeth Allison breakfasted and slept; in fact, she slept till noon, and woke reproachfully but refreshed. For five minutes or so she lay in bed, calmly confronting her problem, and finding it less difficult now that she was less tired. The child was dead, which - perhaps - was merciful, ~~and the effacement of a taint~~; Joanna was free. Yes, free to go upon adventure, to live her life as she chose to live it, unencumbered, and to give expression to the wayward selfishness of youth.

Miss Allison rose, put on a dressing-gown, tidied her hair, and with a new courage went to visit her patient. So soundly had she slept that she did not know that Dr. Benn had come and gone, nor had she heard Magnal's domestic activities below. Miss Allison opened Joanna's door, and feeling calm and cheerful, assumed that Joanna might be feeling likewise.

"Well, my dear, - how are you?"

The blind was down and the room dim. The figure in the bed lay motionless. There was no responsive movement. Was Joanna asleep? Elizabeth Allison crossed softly to the bed, and bending - looked. Joanna's eyes were open.

"Well, my dear, & how are you feeling?"

The head turned sharply on the pillow. There was a little, restive twitch of the shoulders.

"All right, a thanks."

"Good."

"Please, a I don't want to be bothered."

Miss Allison straightened, hesitated and then walked softly out of the room. Sulks? Or was the girl grieving? Well, some emotional shock was understandable. Miss Allison returned to her own room, washed, did her hair and dressed, and went downstairs with the feeling that all might be well with her world.

She found Magnal in his shirt-sleeves, active in the kitchen.

"Hallo, a Elizabeth, feel rested?"

"Yes."

"Splendid."

She saw that mere man had reverted to the tin-opener, sardines, a tongue, California peaches.

"I can manage now."

She was looking far less plain than she felt, and Magnal's smile should have warmed her. How pleasant and comforting was this serene and familiar face.

"I'm butler - till help comes, my dear. a Hadn't we better energise about a handmaid? a There is the spare room."

Miss Allison turned up her sleeves.

"Perhaps. - In a day or two."

"Seen Joanna?"

"Yes."

"How is she?"

Miss Allison was bending over the kitchen range. Hot food would be needed, and Magnal's fire was not what it should be.

"Rather - mute."

"Oh & ! Shock, & I suppose? Benn was quite satisfied."

"Perhaps. I don't know. - "

"Poor kid. & Well, - I think it is rather a mercy that she is not a mother."

Miss Allison was silent. The moods and whims of the young were too incalculable.

"Well, & she will be free to follow her own bent. &

After all, & Lammas isn't a place for a girl with ideas of her own. Old wine and new. - I beg your pardon, Elizabeth, you were not included."

Miss Allison began to stimulate and feed the fire.

"I have no objection. & If I had my choice - I would remain where I am."

"Would you, - Elizabeth?"

"There is - virtue - in maturity."

"My dear, & that is a wise saying."

The day passed and yet another day, and a fallacious tranquility had returned to Lamma. No nurse became available, and in the crisis Miss Allison carried on, with Magnal playing scullion and butler to help her. Joanna's meals went up to her as regularly as clockwork, but the hands of the human clock appeared to stand still, and Joanna's face wore a mask of pale apathy. She was washed and nursed, and she continued strangely mute, and looking like cream that had gone sour. So far as Dr. Benn was concerned everything was well with her, but Elizabeth Allison could swear that something was sick in the soul of Joanna.

There was no sparkle, no life in her; her eyes were like two dull dark pebbles, her voice had a flatness. She showed no feeling, no appetite, no gratitude. She gave Elizabeth Allison a curt "Oh, - thanks," and would glance with lack of interest at the tray. Emotion appeared to be dead in her. She never mentioned the child.

Miss Allison supposed that this apathetic phase would pass, but it did not pass, and Elizabeth was troubled. Was Joanna going to be a mental problem? Strange and disastrous things could happen after pregnancy, especially so when there had been a maggot in the fruit.

Miss Allison spoke to Magnal.

"I'm worried about Joanna."

"Oh ! How?"

"This apathy, & this sullen mood. & I can't get her to talk. & It's as though there was some - resistance."

"Perhaps she's - grieving."

"No, somehow I don't think it is that. & If she would talk, let go."

"The Freudian idea, & Elizabeth. & A father confessor needed. I wonder if I could get her - to talk."

Miss Allison looked worried.

"She might & . Somehow - she's like the Mistbourne that dried up."

"A good simile. & I wonder if I could get her flowing."

It was not vanity that persuaded Magnal to play the part of psychologist - in a very human sense. Joanna had debunked him as man, but - maybe - in feeling passé as the male, Magnal had lost some of the fierceness of sex. He was finding himself more ready to forgive Joanna, and to see life as Joanna saw it. Poor kid, the sex disease had attacked her in a crude and malevolent form, and left her deflated and disillusioned. She needed some new urge, & interest, prospect. There was very little complacency in the Magnal who climbed the stairs and knocked at Joanna's door.

"It's the old man, Joanna. Can I come in?"

There was a pause before she answered him.

"Yes, come in."

She was lying flat in the bed, her black hair spread upon the pillow. Her face looked very pale, her eyes immense. There was a curious languor in her lying, with her hands and arms stretched out beside her. Almost, it was the posture of one who was dying, or who was already dead.

Magnal was conscious of a sudden spasm of pity, and of more than pity. † How had his Joanna faded! All the sparkle and the spirit seemed to have gone out of her. He drew up a chair, sat down, and laid a hand on one of hers. It remained passive under his big paw.

"Well, † my dear, † how are you feeling?"

His tone was paternal, consciously so. Her dark eyes looked at him strangely. What did she see, or fail to see? Her gaze was enigmatic and disconcerting.

"You have had a rough time, Joanna. † We've got to feed you up, and get you well. † But, bad times pass, you know."

She was mute.

"Think of the things you are going to do. † I'm ready to help, you know, my dear. † If you want a life of your

own, self expression and all that, it can be arranged. We two old fogies understand that."

She gazed at him in silence. Her hand made no movement under his. And Magnal was posed. Her pallor and her apathy puzzled him.

"Too tired to talk about things?"

Her head moved uneasily on the pillow.

"I - I don't think I want - anything."

"But - you will do. Of course, my dear. You're young. You have your life before you."

He patted her hand, and it remained irresponsive, flaccid. She closed her eyes and turned her face away. * What did she want? Not that paternal patting, not these platitudes? Was there no flare of passion, no stray tenderness in this master-man? - She wanted - . O, yes, she wanted - mastery, and it was not there. He did not understand the why and the wherefore, how this thing had happened, - that it need not have happened. † Magnanimity, self-effacement, of what use were these to vivid youth?

Magnal sat, balked and bothered. There seemed to be no key to this locked silence. * Was he worrying the child when she wanted to be left alone? He gave her a final pat, and gently withdrew his hand.

"I'll not bother you, my dear. * Just try and take

things as they come. "We're your friends, you know."

He left her, and Joanna lay still, with tears suddenly wetting her cheeks.

Miss Allison's hands were busy, but her ears were listening to distant deepness of Magnal's voice, and the ticking of the clock. She glanced at the face of the clock. Magnal had been with Joanna for ten minutes, and Elizabeth had not been able to catch Joanna's voice ^{coming} ~~going~~ in the duet. The conversation shaped itself like an uneasy monologue, wilfully cheerful, and perhaps a little platitudinous.

Miss Allison peeled apples, and remembered that the master had forgotten to carry in the fire-logs. * Would he make anything of that raw green apple so prematurely fructified upon the tree? She heard Joanna's door open and close, and Magnal descending the stairs. He appeared to hesitate when he reached the passage. Had the confessional failed?

Then, he turned towards the kitchen. He stood in the doorway, and Elizabeth gave him one swift glance. Yes, his face expressed frowning frustration. He did not look at Miss Allison, but at her hands.

"Afraid I bungled it, * Elizabeth. * Couldn't get any response from the child."

Miss Allison went on peeling apples.

"She seems in a funny mood. "A kind of torpor. "
I suppose - that - after a shock of that sort " ."

He rubbed at his beard.

"I'm worried about it. "I don't like her - apathy.
I must have a talk with Benn about her."

XXXIX.

Dr. Benn came down the Lammas stairs with a seriously worried face. He had washed his hands in the bathroom basin, and Miss Allison had brought him a clean towel. He had looked out of the window while he had been drying his hands, and Miss Allison, feeling that he was in no mood for conversation, had left him and returned to Joanna.

Magnal was standing on the hearthrug with his back to the parlour fire. He looked at the doctor's face, and waited. Benn's solemn visage suggested complications.

"I'd like to have a second opinion, Magnal. Carter from Blenborough, if you don't mind."

"Of course, - if you wish it. - Things not quite as they should be?"

Benn helped himself to a cigarette, and frowned as he lit it. He sniffed the smoke, inhaled, and looked at the fire.

"She has a temperature. - And there are other - things I don't like. - I haven't had a case of puerperal - for donkey's years."

"Pnuperal!"

Benn nodded.

"Care to see her yourself?"

Magnal was staring at the window.

"No, - I think I'd rather not. - Get Carter in. Is he - ?"

"Very sound. - Does most of the surgical work for twenty miles. I'm sorry about this."

"No fault of yours, my dear man, I'm sure."

"Well, - I'm pretty careful. - I wonder how long that foetus had been dead?"

Magnal's face had a lost look.

"Yes, - I wonder."

How strange and sudden was all this. Would life keep him guessing until the end? Magnal went out and walked with a kind of savage restlessness, as though to escape from some emotion that was following him with plaintive cries and passionate protests. He climbed Greenbury and saw Witch's Wood below him, black and dead and sinister. Had he been fooling himself, trying to suppress a secret yearning, playing the part of old man while the essential man was strong and live in him? Poor Joanna, the child of Witch's Wood, his dark, Mediterranean girl somehow marked down for tragedy.

Greenbury was too much a hill of memory, and Witch's Wood and Roman House too intimately near. He wanted to

escape from that poignant revelation, the sudden recrudescence of an illness. He went down into the valley, and tramped across it, and over Five Barrow Down, and over towards the old road. He tried to tell himself that he was being senile and sentimental, and that this sudden fever of tenderness was false and unreal. - But things were happening over there. - Those two doctors were busy, and he - was being a little hysterical. - Of course, it would be all right with Joanna, and Benn might be something of an old woman.

He saw two cars coming slowly down the road, one following the other. Chariots of fate! He wanted to shirk the issue, and was scourged by the shame of his own cowardice. He walked along the road to meet them. He saw Benn signalling to the car behind him. He slowed down, pulled up.

What a strange conference was this, out in the open downland. The three men stood together, and their voices sounded small and futile in the great space.

"We've done what we could."

"I'm afraid I'm not too hopeful."

"She must have had death in her."

Magnal felt that he was listening to voices from some other and strange world.

Miss Allison met him with a calm, still face.

"I'm afraid - the news isn't - "

"Yes," said Magnal quickly, passing by and avoiding her eyes, "I met the doctor out there."

Miss Allison hesitated, with her hand to her cheek. She too had been torn out of her tranquility; it had been blown from her like a cloak, and she was wrapping some other garment about her.

"She has been asking for you."

Magnal was by the fire, arms spread, hands resting on the mantleshef, head down. Almost, he looked like a man tied to a cross.

"Has she? - "

"Poor child, - she mustn't be left alone."

"Does she know?"

"Yes."

"Good God, - Elizabeth, - what an end for her, poor kid! How is she taking it?"

Miss Allison moistened her lips.

"She's frightened, so terribly frightened."

"Good God!" said Magnal again.

Elizabeth Allison watched him for a moment. Some profound emotion appeared to be tormenting her. Her face

was all puckered up, her lips pinched and pale; her eyes were set in a hard stare. And then, quite suddenly, her face softened; a little wincing smile betrayed the conquest of compassion.

"I think you ought to see her."

"Yes, I will, - Elizabeth."

He climbed the stairs, holding to the rail like a tired old man. What an ordeal was this! What would he say to Joanna? He hesitated outside her door, and his fingers fumbled at the handle. Then, the door was open and he stood looking in. - Was this death? How strange! She was lying against the pillows, not flat in the bed, her dark hair spread out, her eyes wide and poignant.

She looked at him. Her lips and hands moved, and suddenly he was with her. His gathering of her, and her feeble clinging were one movement. She panted, - shook.

"Oh, - why - must - ? - I'm afraid, - darling, - I'm afraid."

A sudden spasm caught Magnal, and his arms contracted with the force of it.

"Joanna, - my - beloved - ."

Her face was pressed against his. Her voice was a breathless whisper.

"Didn't you know? - All the time. - I thought - ."

It would never have happened."

"God forgive me, - Joanna. I couldn't believe - that - ."

"No, - you seemed not to care. - I didn't care - really - for that - . Oh, why - didn't - ?"

He put his lips to her poor pale little mouth.

"But - we - know now. - Oh, - my darling, forgive me."

She whispered to him.

"Yes. - Don't go, don't leave me. Hold me like that."

Joanna lay in her coffin in the library of Lammis. She looked a very lovely thing, like the Sleeping Princess in a story, and Magnal, having gazed at her, went forth to that last labour. The chapel curtilage was still consecrated ground, and Magnal had found in Melfont St. Giles a parson who was human. Mr. Bull of Blenborough had provided the coffin, and was sending bearers to Mistover, - but Joanna's grave was to be no resting place dug by some stranger. Magnal had taken the work as his, and he chose a place not far from where Joanna's child had been buried. He marked the site, lifted the sods with care and neatness, and set to with pick and spade and shovel. - How familiar,

how bitterly familiar was this labour! So, he and Joanna had worked together on the slopes of Greenbury, uncovering the house of the Roman dead.

All that morning he toiled, and when the work was done, he stood leaning on his spade, and looking down into the dark trench. What a strange thing was life! And stranger still was death. - But what was death? - He rubbed at his beard, and his eyes felt hot. How foolish the wise could be! - There was no escape. Man, in his petulance and his pride, could not withdraw himself and continue to be man. - He had mocked at life, like some urchin straddling a high wall, and life had had its answer for him.

Miss Allison, troubled by his long absence, and by other and secret pangs, wandered up the green way to remind him of that illusion - the passing of time. Elizabeth Allison was in black, with her head uncovered, and her white hair caught the winter sunlight. She came to the end of the flint wall, and looking over it saw Magnal there, bent over his spade and staring into the grave he had dug for Joanna. Miss Allison stood very still, and her face seemed to go pinched and thin. She closed her eyes for a moment, and her lips moved as in prayer. Then, she turned and walked back to the house where Joanna lay in her coffin.

XL.

The apple blossom was out in the orchard, and the white thorns coming into flower. The month of May was being kind both to the fruit blossom and Elizabeth Allison. Miss Allison had driven herself into Blenborough, and returned with a good tempered looking country-girl sitting in the back seat. To discover in this restless age a creature who was not mechanised, [^]that [^]had been Elizabeth Allison's problem, and she had hopes that she had solved it. Rose seemed placid, [^]Rose looked as though she had a healthy appetite, Rose could do simple cooking, Rose had a younger sister who might join her at Lammas. Both girls came from an isolated village and had escaped the taint of the towns.

Miss Allison made cheerful conversation as she drove. Rose must be made to feel at home. The virtues of the common folk have often been written up ad nauseam, but Elizabeth Allison was wise in her benign cynicism. [^]To protect and conserve the right environment for a sensitive and seperative soul the cunning of the serpent might be needed. [^]Miss Allison's devotion had a sweet ferocity. She could be ruthless, she could spread the jam upon the bread, bribe if needs be, circumvent, charm primitive

creatures into feeling comfortable. So, she talked to Rose of food, butcher's meat, treacle tart, fruit, pies, cake, goodies. Oh, yes, Lammas fed its people well, and paid them generous wages. Did Rose know anything about hens and eggs? She did. Could Rose bottle fruit and make jam? No, but she would learn.

"We like plenty of custard and batter, you know, Rose. And there are one or two quite good shops in Melfont - for hats and frocks."

"Yes'm," said Rose.

"And once a week I'll take you into Blenborough. It's nice to look at shops, and have money to spend."

Rose crinkled up her broad, good tempered nose.

"Yes'm. It's very quiet where I came from."

Miss Allison, having introduced Rose to Lammas, and left her to unpack her tin trunk in the pretty little bedroom that was to be hers, went downstairs and looked into both library and parlour. Both rooms were empty, but upon Magnal's desk in the library the manuscript of his magnum opus lay open. Beside it, and acting as a letterweight to a sheaf of notes, stood a little vase of multi-fiori glass. Elizabeth Allison looked at these mute witnesses and smiled.

Where was he?

She could guess, and Elizabeth, having shown Rose round the domestic quarters, went out and down along the green way to the open country. Serenity, sunlight, the turf pied with flowers, white clouds sailing over the great hills. Elizabeth turned towards Greenbury, and climbing the long grass ramp, saw the beeches of Witch's Wood in brilliant leaf. Joanna's wood. Poor Joanna! Miss Allison came to Roman House, and there she saw a figure waist-deep in a trench, carefully shovelling out soil into a riddle and poking about in it with his fingers.

Elizabeth Allison stood for a moment with the sunlight on her face, and a sheen in her eyes. Then she walked softly to the place where he was working, and looked down.

"Any treasures today?"

"Hullo, ♀ Bess! ♀ I think I have struck oil, ♀ a rather promising patch."

She knelt down and took the riddle in her hands.

"How - exciting. ♀ I'll shake."

He smiled at her, and deposited a spadeful of soil in the riddle. Elizabeth Allison set it in motion. They peered, their heads close together.

"Oh, ♀ there's something!"

"By Jove, so there is!"

Magnal's fingers picked out a fibula with a red stone set at the hinge of the brooch's pin.

"I say, # 'you've brought luck, † Bess."

He pulled out a handkerchief and gave the thing a polish, and then pinned it on the front of Elizabeth's frock.

XI

D. Beam drew off his fur-lined slaver, & held his hands to the fire. His skin looked hard with the cold of the north-east wind over the downland country.

"How is he today?"

Miss Albin stood straight & still by the door, back folded, white hair ribbon smooth, her face expressionless.

"Please says he has had an easier night."

"That good! - It has been a wretched week. - Tell me, has he ever been ill like this before?"

Miss Albin looked frightened over three years.

"Yes. Many years ago."

"How?"

"Yes. -"

"But - S. -"

"He was snowed up, or S. - named him."

D. Beam leaned at the chimney for a second, & his eyes were questioning you.

"Some sort of thing."

"Yes."

"You must have had a pretty tough time. - He ^{that} must have got a chill at that poor ~~bad~~ funeral. It was a dreadful day."

Charlotte was silent. Once you she had become a woman of stage silence, yet like one who waited a letter.

A fire was burning in Maynard's room, & he lay propped up in bed, ~~feverish~~ & his breath was laboured & painful. His ^{hand} fingers lay palms upward on the red quilt. He was looking at the nurse who sat reading by the window with a shadow which Miss Albin had lent him on her shoulder. A suppliant figure, - what! And Maynard, fully like a sick & helpless child, ~~did~~ get ~~did~~ not like this woman. She was hair-brained & dominant; she had a nose, a high colour, & stayed blue eyes. There was no documance in her; she was intemperate. And there was another woman, a stage woman who let his fire & carried off meals, & became over-busy with a carpet-sweeper & a duster.

His window was grey, & so was the sky. His head ached; his chest ached, & there were other aches within him. He wanted - . . . But what did he want? All mankind seemed to have gone from him. He felt old & rich, or so old, & yet like a very young child at the mercy of strange women.

When was Elizabeth Alving? Why had she been to see him but once. - Bea had said "No visitors," but could Elizabeth be classed as a visitor? And that other occasion when she had nursed him back to life, all by herself & that seemed up would. How different! And where was the dog? Even the dog had not been allowed into his room.

Margaret moved his back in a restless & almost pained gesture.

"None."

"Yes, Mrs. Margaret."

"Can't I have the dog to see me?"

She had put a spectacle to read with, & they made her look more intelligent & unrepentant.

"Not yet. Doctor's orders. No talking, no visitors."

Margaret regarded a whisper of ironic humor.

"Is a dog included in the forbidding order?"

"Yes."

His hands turned again in the bed. He gave it up, & Anne Strickland, seeing his reading failed to notice how large time hung down his patient's chair.

The sun was shining & Margaret could see that the great hills had lost their greenness & were bathed in light. Spring birds rising, down in the grass, & yet for Margaret no birds sang. His chest had cleared, & pain had passed, but a great weakness possessed him. Spring, the rise of the sap, a beginning all over again, a world that had seemed dead breaking into young green leaf. And one year ago all by dead in a wooden box, youth that had been so brief, & now - was - . . . Oh, ye gods, did he want to forget? This morning, the feeling of being a lost small child who ^{craved} to be comforted & to hold some beating heart!

And then Anne Strickland came into the room, stanching a premonition, & spoke with faint brightness.

"I've got your medicine, Mrs. Margaret."

"Oh, damn my medicine."

She gave him a blue-eyed stare. His patient must be fully better, but he should swallow his medicine ^{all the same}. How was

she to know that he had swallowed other pills, & that other better measures were passing.

When Dr. Bern came that morning he found ^{Maynell} ~~his~~ patient sitting up bed looking combative. Maynell glanced at the nurse, & it was a significant glance, & Bern did not miss its meaning. "It's all right, Nurse; you need not wait."

She left them, "he probably could be heard distinctly" the doctor. She was flat on foot, & her head was heavy.

Bern took a chair by the bed.

"Well, how are we?" - "Better - I think."

"I am it" said his patient, "can we disagree with the nurse?"

"She is a very good nurse."

"Maybe she is, but she makes one feel small. - And why can't I have the dog up here?"

"Well, you might, just for half a dozen."

Maynell rolled his head on the pillow.

"Dr. Elizabeth Albin laid up?"

"No."

"I have only seen her once. - I might have been a case of smallpox."

Now Dr. Bern was wiser than Maynell knew. One night would not a patient developed a natural appetite before suggesting a particular diet? & Bern was a house of subtle reticence.

"She has not been - well."

"By what I told."

"No wonder, my dear man. She is better now, & busy as ever."

Maynell lay & looked at the sunset window, & the doctor looked at Maynell.

"Well - I think Nurse Strickland might leave at the end of the week, if things go well."

Maynell was silent, & then he said - "Can I have that window given Bern. That woman seems to me to fresh air. - Good, how I would like to be out in that sunshine."

Bern rose, & opened the window wide. Yes, his patient was better, & ready now to breathe a fresh air & to come for medicinal daylight.

When he left Maynell & descended the stairs he found ^{one sitting} ~~Dr.~~ Albin & the nurse together in the parlour. They sat there like two strangers who had found no

contact, & what you saw life ^{very} so differently. Miss Albion, whose head had been bent over the sewing, raised it & looked at the doctor, & Ben smiled at her & nodded. Sudden colour seemed to come into Miss Albion's face, & she looked dropped like the look of a shy or pet Bangalore girl.

"Can I have a few words with you, Miss Albion?"

Elizabeth rose, & Ben took the way into the garden, & went into the orchard where the old plum & pear were in flower. Miss Stuckland had watched them from the parlour window. She was a very stupid woman, & a complacent one, & it would never have occurred to her that there could be any occasion when she might be considered superfluous. Miss Albion's face had lost its sudden colour, & was about as pale as the plum blossom.

"Can patient be much better, Miss Albion?"

She smiled vaguely.

"A little - a little - a little - I think Miss Stuckland can leave at the end of the week. - Do you think you can manage?"

"Perfectly," said Miss Albion with pale composure.

Ben gave her a very human smile.

"As a matter of fact he has been asking for you, & rather - well, I told him he had not been well."

Elizabeth's colour was returning.

"I told you, Dr. Benn."

"I know."

"I think you might go off at once now. - I'll have a short talk with Miss Stuckland."

Margaret, sitting up in bed with hands folded, heard footsteps on the stairs. Her dead tired shuffling shoes were part of the ^{climbing} ~~climbing~~ of the nurse's authoritative feet, & she did the stairs creak. She came knocked at his door, & Margaret's face went all funny.

"Come in."

She entered, closed the door gently, & stood there, & Margaret turned in the bed. For a moment or two they looked at each other in silence with a pressing & searching apprehension.

"Oh, - Elizabeth, sit down, my dear. Ben tells me you have been ill. - Oh, - you don't look it."

There was colour in his face, & a secret shame in his eyes.
"I am much better."

He lay back & looked at her, & a sudden & immediate shame possessed him. He - shy of the woman with the silver hair! - Damn it, - but - And then a smile that was like a child's made his face close to her.

"Elizabeth - I - er - bell - how's the new help doing?"
She ^{replied} ~~answered~~ calmly, tranquil, suddenly & strongly confident.

"Very well."

"That's good. - And I'm rather tired of being nursed. - Er, I wanted to ask you a question, Elizabeth."

She waited, & his strange diffidence was wiser & braver to her.

"I don't know whether you will stay or not, - I am a selfish brute, - but I want you, Elizabeth."

He put out a hand, & she held it, & they were holding back when they heard the dog flummoxing up the stairs. He whined & watched at the closed door. - Yet how should a dog have known that there was new life & merriment in the old house, & scrambled up to share it.

Margaret sat in the garden until the dog at his post. A little breeze was blowing & from the Roman chimney a plume of smoke floated. Over Alchim's May flowering tulips swayed with the wind, & their coloured cups were open to the sunlight, & Margaret watched them with quiet eyes. Peace, sunlight, the old house & something of white blossom & garden life seemed good & right to her on this Spring morning.

He spread his back feathers upward as he moved. They had become pale under the glare of the burning & patina of labour. A month ago they had felt like dead old hands, but as he closed the fingers & clanked them he felt them to be once more the hands of man.

"Have you seen your roost, old chap?"

Bobo lifted his head & his eyes lay dead as a dog's eyes can lay. He thumped the ground with his tail.

"We'll soon alter that, master. - When are we going up to Roman House with a spade?"

Yes, life seemed to have signified this, which was good in these two caplins & own-cherished dogs. Had old Thomas been happier than the modern? Probably. But what was happiness? Being quick with yourself & your eye, maturity had

toil
new

green-gold flames of ~~an~~ afterglow some memorable & successful sunset.

Yes, the tragedy was youthful, a Maugham at fifty could accept it as one of those strange & inevitable happenings which enfold the un-expected changes of mortal man. So, right from old clouded shepherd ^{from} accepted it, as a man of the woods or some stony & solemn hermit. Such happenings were like the inevitable smother of nature, smother the weather people, a fooling all men saw those whose feet were on the mysterious earth. You might bow your head, & you would with the mystic symbol of the Cross, a sunny at the starkest sky, exclaim - "Why all this? Yes, why."

Elizabeth Albee dead a voice calling 'du.

Elizabeth - Elizabeth.

The voice came from the Chamber forth & far a moment she stood silent, & then a sudden shiver chilled her face.

"Elizabeth, I want you.

For she wanted, & as she needed to be wanted after all
three years. She went softly & deliberately into the
house, & saw her steadily in the open doorway.

Mr. Abbott, - I am going up to Ransom House. Come with me.

The dog was with him, & together they passed through the flower bed and when the deer was busy, & took to the open ground that was filled with flowers. They did not hurry, & she watched his face & his breath, while the dog, 'both a head, turned now & again to question this lagging person.

So they came by the gateway & slant up the flank of the down to that dead lane where Mayan's labors were not finished. They stood side by side, gazing upon the subtle landscape, the brilliant spray of verdance of nature's loam, & all those mysterious hills a distance. Deeper of them spoke.

Then Prigalski went to see her. She pulled up
now that significant or "secret" smile & her eyes were
dewy.

She knew at last that she was wanted as she had
wished to be wanted after all these years.

X X X I X

D. Ben came down the Summer stair with a worried & thoughtful face. He had worked his back in the bathroom basin, & Miss Albion had brought him a clean towel, & D. Ben had put certain confidential questions to Miss Albion. He found Margaret standing before the pattern for a Margaret who was much more displeased a worried than the doctor.

" Well - my love, Bern.

"Well, - my lunch, Ben."
Dr. Brown looked intently, "deferred having to one of my regular
cigarettes. A lot of it out with out of the jail."

"Not much. - "Could" get y^e out of the gal.

Then can we.

Curiously swollen & recumbent. - Was she quite normal - before
all the happened. I have a healthy young person.

all the happiness.
"Quite - as I told you." a happy, healthy young person.

You don't think she is - I have had one or two over in my time.
I don't like it. - Of course, there is

The psychology of the ^{the} brother man. - Of course, some we
shall to be considered. - ^{the} - Bern, especially so -

"The human psyche is a queer thing - Bern, especially so -
in many ways. - I remember even - well, even now. - For

Physical condition is satisfactory.
 Absorbent. No temperature, good pulse, not a trace of
 any organ. She just seems to be the little a
 little coarser, & her big eyes stare at you.

" Just what we have found.

" Sp - you could sit in - to talk, spit them out.
" I have a bad off per-son

I asked Prince Allison. - how have a ball of free-running,
but the girls are smart with a woman - as she is with

but the girls as usual will do
a man. If possible - I think I would try
get her away.
dear

Get her away,
Chase?
"Yes" - She's gone. I suppose another ^{deep} ~~dark~~ in

"I wonder!" said Imagination. "Does youth ever know

"I wonder!" said Maxine. "Our youth was never
what it was, or know it when it gets it?"

But Maynard had other things to trouble him. Three

Albion had taken most of the steam, & there were shadows
under her eye. She was Bob's very friend. And poor old
Bob, who was beginning to feel the year, was showing signs
of being a rich dog, & no creature can be more comely
familiar than a beloved dog who regards in pain. Poor
Maggie had nearly fallen off the log ^{under} a mass of
logs. Poor Albion needed a rest, Bob a visit to
the vet, & he himself a respite from these alarms &
occasions. Was Brown playing the complete & self-
satisfying little game, if so was he to be allowed to
dominate the house, & behave like a master & tyrant
little mollusc?

After that day Maggie watched Bob in a
blatant chase to Dinglefoot. He caught Brown before the
doctor had started on his afternoon round. His question
was a simple one. Did Blenheim or Camden Tracey
possess a nursing home? Camden Tracey did boast such
an institution.

"Good he, - Brown, do you think the girl could be
moved? - The steam is getting too much for poor
Albion."

"Certainly - in an ambulance."

"I wonder if you would ring up the home."

"Yes. - I think it is a sound idea. - A new
arrangement, & perhaps a little - change. - I'll ring them
up. As a matter of fact I shall be writing a
couple of miles of Camden. I'll go on & explain the
case to the mother."

"Splendid. - Another question, Brown. My poor old dog's
not too well. I ^{have} ~~lost~~ him in the car. - Who is
the best vet?"

"I'd go to Barton of Blenheim."

The news that wing was both good & bad. The nursing home
at Camden Tracey would have a room vacant in three
days time, but Barton of Blenheim had been long
about poor Bob. He was afraid that the dog had a
growth & Bob travelled back to Camden supposed up in
the night & with a master who was worst in bad

silence. Miss Albion had to be told, & there was other telling to be done.

"I'm afraid the verdict is not too happy, Elizabeth."

"About Bob?"

"Yes."

"Poor darling."

"But the Candor has no other course. - She will have to be told."

He looked questioningly & almost apologetically at Elizabeth.

"When will it be?"

"In three days' time. - Ben is arranging for an absence. The change may be good for him. - And the rest - for you."

You had had much to put up with, Elizabeth. Miss Albion smiled faintly. She might be tired in body, but not in ~~last~~ spirit.

"Should I tell her?"

"Would you?" "Candor - I feel it would come better from you."

"Yes. I'll tell her."

But Elizabeth Albion said to Soames was not for the ear of man. Maybe, Elizabeth told the truth, & he supplied a variant of it that might free Soames - the three of them from the clumsy chicanery that can afflict incapable of biography & ego. Soames lay a historical with complete confidence to Miss Albion. Soames was quite capable of being free in bed, & she knew it. She had been of it all more often than he could suspect.

So, she needed a change, did she? They were sending her to a nursing home. She was disturbing the peaceful atmosphere of Soames, a holding of the capitation of the Minister of Pensions. They wanted to be rid of her. - Soames was a secret rebel against the thing that she had suffered. He was ⁱⁿ revolt over a mark, a bed & ^{settled} ~~settled~~ a pretty - passionate restlessness, a protest against passive acceptance of the shackles which the conventional mind ~~seeks~~ ^{seeks} to impose upon youth. Soames had his own secret. Had Marked Pensions seen him as a party instead of a party, & played the man instead of the Pensions

fortune father, this might have been different. O.S. my different.
 self - what may not also placate youth & now; it may
 please it, & antagonize it.

"Come on I to go."

"In three days time, my dear."

Sooner by itself. So, she had not been consulted. They were
 treating her like a child, & she was no longer a child, but a
 young woman who had borne a child, & was active in revolt against
 the whole existing manner. ~~the whole~~ Sooner yet was
 to escape from Egypt, cross the Red Sea, & a distance
 to Panama, the land of youth & promise. And she would not
 take forty years about it - either.

Sooner left her bed, locked the door, & proceeded to do her
 hair - to dress. She did not put on her "working" frock, but
 the flannel one which suited her mood & her family, also, a
 pair of silk stockings & her best shoes. Her window showed
 her that it was a beautiful day, clear - rain - a north
 east wind. She felt a little afraid after her fortnight in
 bed, & but her spirit was sufficient for the exertion. In
 this vile weather Maynard was not likely to be up at
 breakfast.

Sooner took her shoes off to descend the stairs. Miss Albion
 happened to be deep in the stairs cupboard, & she did not hear
^{stealthily} ~~stealthily~~ Sooner's approach along the passage to those two narrow
 doors, & opened herself. She opened the parlour door. She
 was now up. So, she would be in the library.

She knocked. A voice said - "Come in."

She entered, closed the door, & standing with her back to it,
 confronted & checked & arrested Maynard.

"Sooner -!"

"May I have a few words with you, now."

"But, Sooner - you ought not to be - up."

"I'm quite all right, - thank you."

Maynard was up, & look rather like a bothered elderly professor.

"Sit down, my dear. - Does Miss Albion know you -?"

Sooner sat down.

"It is not Aunt Bern's business, - but mine. - I don't want to
 go to a nursing - house."

"But, my dear, Dr. Bern has argued every thing. - What do
 you -?"

I went to go to Sardinia.

Phygel stared at her. He saw his hand over his innocent hair, almost as though he were searching for ~~conscience~~ a ~~idea~~ idea. - What, the devil? Joanna sat with her hands folded in her lap. - She was more mother of herself than Phygel was of his motherhood. "So - Garden?"

" L. - Sanderson

" Qu.

"You don't mean to say you think of - wrong - your
- or - relationship - ?"

Alant, he killed, & she recovered hi.

"Oh, - Habit Below? No, that's not the idea. - I want to join the Slade School, or something like that."

"A case."

So say he - that, it may be next. - But I want to try
the next. - I want my share."

Pygmalion walked round the room, rubbing it with his hand. He came to rest before the fire, & stood staring at it, with his back to Oscar.

"You shall, - eh? - Well, of course, - that's quite another
 matter. - But, just at present - You're not
 fit -"
 "I shall be in a week or two."

I shall be in a week or two.

Myself was stolen in hand instead of robbery act, & the moment was almost a career. A career may include playfulness & a sense of humor, smiling at a thing - a more suggestive of intelligibility & penetration. Well, well, well, life had put this in a career! Here was youth with its back to the door & holding it, & demanding freedom & opportunity. A warm place in the heart! The next would war - most certainly - playing shittles with some of the old poltroons. So, I was claiming my share. And why not? She had ability, considerable ability. Had he any right to expect that she should consecrate it to his service? The dream of Roman Hours, & a Machiavellian maid & ^{melting} ~~melting~~ ^{month} was dead.

Maximal tried to force her, & he was smiling into his beard.

"Opportunity, my dear. - Yes, you have a right to it. I will do. - You have given me much. Now, it is my turn. I'll help."

Is a little fine and infinitely grave.

"Will you?"

" I will. - Be patient for a week or two. Get your strength back, ~~the~~ ~~the~~ ~~the~~ ~~will~~ ~~poly~~ ~~nich~~. You shall find your own out-reach ~~on~~ ~~or~~ find a master. You shall take up residence in some quiet hotel or boarding-house. I'll make you an allowance of - "

Her lips moved as though in sudden protest, but he held up a hand, & continued.

" But, - we won't call it an allowance - but - a relay. Or better still - a guaranteed income - so long as you need it. I've talked a year, my dear, if you can manage that. And no - stipulation - or ~~reimbursement~~ ~~restriction~~."

She looked at him with her great dark eyes. Her shadowy solemnity broke into a sudden sparkle. She spoke up, & went to him.

" You are - a report, a perfect labor. - It's great of you, - she smiled him.

When Miss Albion heard the news she was tempted to carry it to the light & examine it like a ~~woman~~ ~~woman~~ ~~relecting~~ ~~a~~ ~~thorough~~ ~~with~~ ~~a~~ ~~slap~~ ~~where~~ ~~the~~ ~~illumination~~ ~~was~~ ~~artificial~~. Also, - why that flowing speech & the rich stacking? Were they considered essential to the charming of the capitalist? It was not that Elizabeth Albion felt cynical. She was cherishing the vision of a final security, a little tentative of a triumph that could be trusted to a Hubert Bloor. Would the flight of the gay bird from the nest be final? Why then was she not to flatter back a speech of the parasite away when the weather proved rough, & food was ~~about~~ ~~unfurnished~~.

But Joana did not go to the morning-dance at B. Lough. Instead of that she displayed a sudden cheapness, put on her work clothes & became quietly busy in the house. She behaved as though she was performing a last duty before going out into the world & leaving Joana for good to her elders.

" You must not venture yourself, my dear."

" No, but Ben, - I want. - I feel different now that everything is settled."

" I hope you will have very success, Joana."

I mean to. - Some day, Aunt Bess, perhaps you will
come to London & see my first ^{fraternal} ~~fraternal~~ ^{fraternal} ~~fraternal~~.

Our Alliance sealed truly. How wonderful was the expelling
of youth!

of youth.
Maynard still had funds in London who could advance
the matter of the arctic ^{education}. He drove hard to London
a report two days in pursuing Soames' adventures, but it was
Miss Albion who travelled to town with Soames &
now he settled in a Chelsea banking house. Soames
avoided Bloomsbury, which - perhaps - was significant. Maynard
drove then to Bloomsbury and a party March morning.
Soames hired his carriage with a bright, competent
driver, & it occurred to him to wonder as he walked off
the black platform whether he & Soames would meet
again. She had ^{the} cheque in her bag, & the assurance
that fifty pounds would be transferred quarterly from
Maynard's account & credited to her with the Bank
Chelsea branch of the same banking ~~company~~.

Margaret drove back to Gammar's where I had a
burning day. The road was a south-easterly & the
spring ^{was} ~~was~~ ^{prominent.} That a flower was out, over the
last hill ~~remained~~ waited until this little ^{sunnier}
in the air & the town more or black in a mid-morning.

Maynard put the car away, & entering the house found
his trunk laid for him in the parlour, a poor Rob-
bings in his basket before the fire. "I'll say looked at
him appealingly. He seemed to say - "What is the matter
with me, Master?" Maynard bent down & covered him.

He looked. He drank half a bottle of Brandy as a challenge to fight a hot grey March day. He lit a pipe, piled logs in the fire, & sat down with his toes to it. Bob, muffled up in a blanket, with his mouth resting on the edge of the blanket, looked drunkenly at the

8. What is the matter with me, Prouty.

Przygod returned the day - ~~the~~

" The table is, old ~~man~~ ^{but} we both young old.

Meyers was bed up. He said that to Clinchbell. Their
Catherine was to charter a local train at Pillsbury for
her return going to Sammar. Meyers got his sword

the, & then went out a window. He was full, rather, lonely.
He chided himself, but he would not give up the wind
miller. He looked at the contemplated River House. For weeks
the work had been in abeyance. Could he resume it? Oh,
probably. What else was there to do?

He returned to Samson. - When would Elizabeth be back?
It would be good to see that familiar, loyal face. He
was restless. Well, - why not by the table for dinner?
He did so & he laid it for two. - He found himself
looking out of the window.

Just when it was beginning to grow dark he heard the
car. Some speaker made his point in the light.
That had - just left, & other things! He went out to
meet Elizabeth Albin.

THE SURREY SCENE

WARWICK DEEPING

•
Copy of Original Courtesy of

Sir Reginal Worthington

THIS is no guide-book. I would describe it as a personal pilgrimage taken after the war, to revisit all the familiar places which had been lost to me for so many years. It is a return to England, in one of her most lovely counties and in the Spring. And it is more than that, for in our new joyousness, we discovered much of Surrey that was strange to us and were moved to exclaim — “ How did we come to miss this in the old days ? ” The answer is — I think — “ Speed ”, and that restlessness which afflicted many of us in the years between the wars. Maybe one is both older and wiser, and having lost so many things and people, we have learnt to stand and look and heed without haste the loveliness that is left to us.

There is no ordered plan here. We went when and whither the spirit moved us. We have so much planning in the new world that a certain happy casualness is pleasant, or so it seems.

I owe certain apologies and explanations to any reader who may ramble through the book. I have taken certain liberties in the casting of characters. I have concealed a somewhat simple Englishman behind the person of a certain Warwick Deeping.

If some of the erudite quarrel with my data, or my questioning of them, it must be so. If any lover of England chooses to follow us about Surrey, I would stress the value of the personal, in seeing and interpreting. Without personality and a certain happy childishness — what is life ? Just a travel-book — and a rather dull one — that may be out of date in ten years.

CHAPTER 2

How It Came About

IN the beginning, there was darkness and God made light. In the case of my Stella, the process was reversed. Light she had — until the Devil gave her darkness. All through most of the War Years — that had been my problem and hers.

My wife had lost her sight in one of London's raids, and I, a semi-invalid not fit for the army or the factory, had given what strength and energy I had to the production of food on a small farm we owned, and to the writing of books. But my blind comrade could no longer see the first blossoms in flower, nor the apples ripening upon the trees, yet her courage and her patience were to me a constant source of gratitude and of wonder. I used to take her with me whenever I could. She would sit near me while I worked. She was taught Braille, and she could read, and music was a constant joy to her. I could bless the wireless.

But what a confined and thwarted life was hers, and sometimes I thought of her as a blind blackbird in a cage. She had enjoyed singing in the old days, but now her voice was mute.

How the dark doom of the war closed upon us more and more ! Winter after winter, day after day. Repression, boredom, weariness, washing-up, ration cards, fuel restrictions, and more and more official fuss. It became a kind of prison world, full of eternal and wearying repetition. Feet and backs ached, yet the patience of England held. Never have I known more kindness than was accorded to us during those dreadful years.

The spirit of play seemed dead. I had played no games since the autumn of '39. Yet, all this taught one certain things. I had been a somewhat irritable mortal, but my wife's tragedy made selfish lapses somehow impossible, for — you see — I loved her.

Courage. Yes, courage she had. She would not sit down blindly outside the dark doors of her fate. She taught herself to do things, and it was a marvel to me how her hands developed a delicate sense of touch. She could wash-up, make beds, even dust the beloved china on the dining room mantle piece, and arrange flowers. If there is a sixth sense, she developed it. She seemed able to sense without touching the objects that were near her.

But it was a maimed life, especially so during that last dreadful winter and its disappointments. I could feel something wilting in her, and it moved me to pangs of compassion. What could I do to make a break in this dark monotony, this perpetual sameness.

And then, when the spring was coming in, and hope grew clearer, I had an inspiration. We had a small car laid up, and into my head flashed the idea of a book on the county which we loved. For years, I had not seen it; she would never see it again save through my eyes and in the essence of a memory.

“ Wild Surrey after The War ! ”

Yes, wild Surrey for those who loved it — the English scene rediscovered after all these years.

The loveliness of the idea leaped in me. Why not — if — — ?

II

I HAVE often thought and said hard things of the official world, but in this particular case, I must have bumped up against some minor Pooh Bah on a morning after he had had bacon and eggs for breakfast or been presented with a bottle of gin. I had sent in my application with a feeling of forlorn scepticism. I had spent a hour in drafting it so that it might be more persuasive. I had some reputation as an author, but I knew that

Officialdom has no respect for books. Had I been the local piano-tuner or hairdresser or pork-butcher, I should have had much more chance of being taken seriously, and my service been regarded as essential. Gentlemen must have their hair dressed, but the production of a book can be regarded as superfluity.

I did not tell Stella of the adventure, for I feared to raise false hopes. I had had the car licensed as an act of faith. Each morning I looked for the official envelope, and on a Friday — the 13th, I found it on the mat. Surely — the omens were all against us. I took the thing into my den, and opened it, and drew out the registration book. My fingers trembled. Should I see the edge of red lettered coupons ? I looked. I could hardly believe it. The things were there.

They had not given me as much as I had asked for, but we had the right to take the road, and enough petrol to allow one drive a week. Our small car was an economic beast, and would cover nearly forty miles to the gallon. I felt like kissing these little bits of paper.

I heard Stella on the stairs. She could make her way everywhere over our funny old house. In the early days, I had always shepherded her down the stairs, but now I knew that such interference worried her.

“ Hello, my sweet. It’s a lovely morning — what about a little drive ? ”

She paused and stood quite still.

“ Drive ? ”

I went and held one of the coupons close to her lips.

“ Blow.”

She did.

“ Hear anything flutter ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ A coupon, my dear, a petrol coupon. I asked for them, and lo — the incredible has happened. ‘ Moses ’ has just enough old petrol in his tank to

get us down to the village garage."

She put out her hands to me.

"Oh — John — how lovely! How did you ——" ? "

"I am writing a book on Surrey revisited after the war. Wild Surrey, Hunt Wood, and Blackdown, and Farley Heath, and Holmbury, and Leith Hill, the Hog's Back, and Compton and Shere."

My voice must have been lyrical, and I felt the singing, and then suddenly, I was afraid. Would her blind self feel tantalised by all the loveliness she could not see ?

I looked at her anxiously.

"Will you — like it ? "

"Oh — John — just to be in and near the places we used to know."

"That's all I want, darling."

I kissed her. I was happy.

III

OVER breakfast we made our plans. Mine was to be no pontifical book, no manual stuffed with erudition. We were to set forth like a man and a girl in search of old county that was new, this England which we had not seen for so many years. What should we find ? Would it seem as lovely as of old, or perhaps lovelier ? Did it matter if we got lost, or found that we had forgotten some of the trackings and lanes ? Did anything matter save that freedom had come back to us — with that Accursed Country across the channel bleeding and crumbling to death. Nor would it be a mere idle pilgrimage. I felt that we could sit side by side in some village church, listen to some old clock ticking and give thanks in silence for victory and peace. Nor should we forget all those patriotic men who had given this England back to us.

IV

BUT the process of getting "Moses" upon the road was not immediate. He had to be un-jacked, and towed down to the village garage. I had a new battery, dry and stored, bought in the hope of the blessings of Officialdom, but "Moses" showed no sudden inclination to do his stuff. He was serviced, but I regret to say that he had to be towed three miles before his engine consented to function. His tyres were not too bad, and his electric indicators worked, though — to begin with — I got rather muddled over their manipulation.

I put the great question to Stella.

"Where — first, my sweet?"

She had her answer ready.

"Oh, Newlands Corner, John, and Shere."

CHAPTER 3

Newlands Corner - The Silent Pool - Shere

I WILL confess that when I turned off the Portsmouth Road towards West Clandon, I was conscious of strange, inward tremors. The emptiness of the great road had astonished me. Almost it was the high road of forty years ago, save for its surface. There was not a car parked opposite the " Hunt ", and Ripley was a place of peace. Vans and lorries we did meet and two or three probably official cars in a hell of a hurry — about what ?

We were in no hurry, and I kept below thirty to conserve tyres and petrol. As we slid down the long straight stretch of road to West Clandon, it seemed to me that the gardens of all the new lawns here were more rich and flowery. England had gone garden-minded and was cherishing the fruits of the earth instead of hitting tennis-balls.

We drove through West Clandon, that long and lovely village. No change here. The great copper beech by the church was coming into leaf, and stood out gorgeously against the other greeneries.

I pulled up at the crossroads where the tall, dark A.A. Scout had given me many a signal. No traffic here. I slid across and saw the Downs, and all that spacious splendour. What should we find up yonder ? Filth and devastation ? I put " Moses " at the steep hill, and up we climbed past the old chalk pit. The yews looked very black, with the thorns in flower beside them.

We came to huts and acres of cinder, and turf that had been chewed into a brown poach by heavy lorries. I pulled up, got out, and went exploring.

Stella had uttered one word — " Cowslips."

I knew where cowslips use to grow. I would find some for her. She could smell them even if she could not see their little yellow faces.

The Army had gone, and though it had left huts, cinders, odd remnants of

barbed wire and some litter behind it, there was far less damage than I had feared. Even in this dry and brilliant spring, nature was already resurgent. I wandered into a little grove of yews and thorns where lorries had been parked and the turf-less soil was crushed and scarred with tyre tracks. Here I noticed an intriguing thing. The lower branches of the yews had been hacked back and thin stems rose from the naked earth, but round each thorn was a circle of young green growth. That pleased me. There was humour in it. Lady Thorn had said — “Keep of my petticoat, you lads, or I’ll scratch you.” And the lads had kept off.

I wandered on and down and amid the rough grass, I found Stella’s cowslips. I picked a bunch and took them back to her, and passed them in.

“Things are not too bad.”

She put the flowers to her lips.

“The darlings. They smell of victory.”

“Yes, nature has not gone Nazi, and Hitler will soon be dead.”

We drove on, and I had a glimpse of the poor old Newlands Corner Hotel looking sad and shabby. Stella and I had dined and danced there in the old days.

The tea rooms and the benches were derelict, and a forlorn notice told one that members of the services alone were served.

And then, I saw a painted board that astounded me.

“Centre of the International Soviets.”

Well, I’m damned ! Russians here ! Even Newlands Corner had a tinge of red.

II

WHEN we reached the crown of the hill, I pulled off the road and saw that

familiar Surrey scene spread before me. There was no human figure here save that of a young woman waiting for a bus. No cars, no crowd, no noise. I sat for a moment and gazed, and then I glanced at Stella.

“ Like to get out ? ”

She nodded. Her face had a sweet serenity and I loved her for it.

We stood side by side and holding hands, on the little plateau that was bald as a bald man's head. The turf had been killed, and looking northwards, I saw that the Great Way was a mere dirt-track. But the view was there as of old, with all its landmarks — Hindhead, Blackdown and Hascombe, Farley, Hunt Wood, the Albury village, the woods about Albury Park, Holmwood, and Leith Hill. It was one of those blue days of shadow and sunshine and at one moment distances would gloom themselves into veritable ultramarine, and then flash back into sunlight.

Everywhere was the young green of the yew, virginal in its contrasts, elm, birch, oak, chestnut, the silverness of poplars, the sable of yews, the dark green tops of Scotch firs. Never had I seen Surrey look more lovely and more mysterious, with the thorns and the wayfaring trees in flower, and the blue mists, and the brilliant woods where the sunlight fell upon them. I could see those strips of arable slanting up the hill beyond Albury, so medieval in their quaintness. Hunt Wood and Farley loomed black. The South Downs were lost in the blue spring haze.

I felt Stella's fingers tighten on mine.

“ Is it —— ? ”

“ Just as it was — but somehow strange and new. It's a blue day, darling.”

I heard her draw a deep breath — a little sighing round like wind in the grasses.

“ I can see it — inside me.”

“ That's good. I've give my —— ”

For even and because of all this beauty, her blindness hurt me. I felt a

selfish beast for bringing her up here, and she seemed to divine these qualms.

“ It doesn’t wound me, John.”

There was not a soul about, and I kissed her.

“ I think you are about the bravest thing on earth.”

III

THE bluebells were out, with no childish fools to ravage them. I saw the Great Way going in its old greenness along the ridge towards Netley Heath.

I felt the pull of Stella’s arm.

“ Let’s go a little way along the Ridge.”

I turned with her and guided her across the parched and flinty earth, avoiding tyre scars with the mud still caked in them. The sun had gone behind a cloud and the valley between the trees was cobalt blue. I could see St. Martha’s and its sandy hill.

“ John.”

“ Yes.”

“ Has the grass all gone ? I feel nothing but —— ”

“ Yes, I’m afraid it has, my dear. The war has worn out nature’s carpet.”

“ It used to be so lovely.”

“ Well, I suppose it will come back. If the Pilgrims ever tread this way down yonder, which I bet they did — the old turf must have been soft to their feet.”

Then an absurd thought stuck me. The ruin of the downland turf was rather hard on the rabbits. Acres of perfect pasture had ceased to be. Even the Surrey rabbits had a case against Hitler.

I must have chuckled, for she asked me what the joke was. I told her.

“ Perhaps all the rabbits have gone, John, or the soldiers snared them.”

I happened to see a patch of the characteristic black pellets under the leaves of a furze bush.

“ No — Bunny is still here. He has left his cards as of old.”

IV

WE stood a while, and then turned to the car. I let “ Moses “ free-wheel slowly down the long road that slanted towards the face of the Down. The brittle grass still had a greyness. There was a great chalk seam where an anti-tank ditch had been filed in. The weird shacks which had concealed strong-points were ragged ruins. Where the hillside had been ploughed, the soil looked powder-grey against the dark yews.

So, we came to the Silent Pool, and Sherbourne Farm the one somewhat sentimental, the other not at all so. They would have warned that the farm was not for the casually curious.

The cottage garden, where one used to get the key for the gate, was as flowering as ever, but all gates were open. Was that prophetic ? I am not a believer in uncontrolled gates, as in suffering the thoughtless herd to plough in at its pleasure. Yet we were utterly alone here on this Spring day. Stella's arm was in mine, and I paused for a moment by the brick wall of the lower pool to see if I could spot any trout. I did not see any fish, but thousands of tadpoles.

We went on and in by the little gate, with the tall trees green above us, and the box bushes duelling the path. The funny old rustic hut was there, still standing on guard between the two sheets of water. We were assailed from somewhere by a healthy smell of pigs. But there was the pool, silent as ever, and of the colour of bottle green when looked at from where we stood. I have never seen a more elusive stretch of water, for its colours vanish with the day and your stance. When we moved on up this path and

looked down upon the pool, the centre of it was coloured peacock blue, and below the surface a forest of green water weed moved never a tendril. The stillness and the silence were utter, nor did the tall trees flutter a single leaf.

I described it all to Stella as we stood. I told her how the two great beech trees comforted each other across the pool. One was in young leaf, the other still wintery. Why? One could shrug and say that nature has an individual slyness of her own, and is no more to be standardised than man — despite all man's philosophy.

The upper end of the pool was somewhat scummy and covered with bird-scales. Someone had thrown some boards into it. I suppose that if the mass-world had its way all that water would be orange peel, waste paper and discarded cartons. But paper is short, thank God, and the country has rested from the manifestations of many.

The bit of crumbling brick wall still stands at the head of the pool. What had been its purpose? I do not know. Some old fellow who had been dead a hundred years might have told me.

We did not wonder up the great yew walk which climbs the downs, for Shere and a tea waited for us, but my memories could be renewed another day. This stop, sylvan tunnel and the old chalk pit beside it, have always had a peculiar fascination for me. Did travellers along the Ridge Way drop down to drink at the pool? Was it a sacred place in these old days, mysterious and magical? Maybe it was.

A sudden thought came to me as we passed back by Sherbourne Farm. What a pleasure is a farm, with a place on the map! Somehow it is timeless, rooted in the earth, alive with the profound significance of the seasons.

How different from Number 11 Redbrick Avenue, Tooting! Number 11 has no place on the map, and about as much personality as an oil-drum.

I said so to Stella, and she reproved me.

“ Number 11 matters to Number 11, John.”

“ I suppose it does.”

“ They can't help being what you call anonymous.”

V

SHERE — was there was a more perfect village than this ! And the peace of the War had descended upon it. Ours was the only car parked by the swift and flicking River Tillybourne. I wanted to wander a little before tea at the “ Lavender Lodge ”, a pleasant place in spite of its Ye Olde Shoppe affectation. And Stella humoured me, We idled around for five minutes, I — looking for some blemish, and finding none. Had I been an artist I could have spent a year in this village, finding in every corner of it beauty to put upon canvas.

In the tea-room we saw a notice — “ Owing to shortage of staff — you may have to wait.”

We had to wait.

Now, I am apt to be a silly and impatient soul about such matters, and in the old days I might have fretted and scolded, but my wife's blind face had instilled into me an un-male patience. Moreover, the poor and solitary soul in the flowery what-not had every table to serve, so I made conversation and looked out of the window at the willows and the brook.

“ Where are the ducks ? ”

Yes, where were the ducks, the famous Shere ducks who from times immemorial have dabbled and upended in the Tillybourne, and stood on the bank and exhibited the amazing elasticity of their necks in the process of self-valeting.

“ No ducks, John ? ”

“ Not yet. I hope they haven't all been eaten.”

“ Oh no, people aren't as greedy as all that.”

I doubted it — but our tea arrived, and I did the pouring out, and selected the best of the scones and the cakes, and filled Stella's plate. At the next table a superior young woman with a throaty voice announced to the world that she expected to be sent to Germany to assist in re-educating the Blond Beasts.

I chatted. I am afraid I have reached an age when I resent having information thrust upon me. I do not listen to the Brain Trust. The smug title of that exhibition should be an offence to all those who are irrepressibly mature. I like to dawdle about and sit and stare, and warm myself in the sun, and chase any cats over the garden wall. Re-educate the Hun ! How would some arrogant He-Man agree with that superior young woman ? Brains and tongues would have to fight it out, and posteriors might be victorious.

In due course, I bit a pipe and saw two old dears arrive with huge bunches of bluebells. I told Stella about it, and made the comment that some people never grew up, but remained predatory children.

“ Don't be a prig, dear,” said she.

“ No, darling — but —— ”

“ It may not be just childishness — Women can't resist flowers. They may have a certain smell of sentiment — besides —— ”

“ Apologies, darling.”

“ They may have been the first bluebells they have seen since the war began, and even if they wither, there is something that doesn't wither.”

Probably she was right, and I had been caught out in priggery.

Now, as I helped Stella down the steps, lo and behold, the ducks came paddling from under the road-bridge with sudden loud quackings. Surely

this was a significant salutation and an omen, and was a reproof. Ducks did not attach blame to human actions. Or did they ?

“ Gosh ! ” said I. “ They have come out to greet you. Two white ones and a five brown ones. So, Hitler has not put all ducks down in the pot. Hats off to Donald.”

What is there to say about Shere ? So much, that our evening became a garrulous old man. The little space leading to the church always makes me think of a French Place, save that it is so very English. I saw that the village elm had a board attached to it “ Public Announcements ” and that the board was empty. Thank God for that ! How sick we were of being hectored and ordered about, and told what to eat, and what we couldn't eat, and treated like a lot of moronic children. Officialdom is not very subtle in its psychology. Whenever I see the Squander Bug, I feel a wicked impulse prompting me to waste a five pound note.

But there was the old church with its grey, shingled space, and lych gate, and flint wall. We strolled to it, and I noticed that the shingles on the spire were in a sad way, and beginning to flake like old paint. Shere church is credited with a thousand years. Hitler was preparing a thousand years of slavery for humanity, but this St. James Shere Church had the last laugh of him.

It could lean on that great red brick buttresses and chuckle, if a church can chuckle, and why not ? If anyone who is knowledgeable wishes to judge the church's age, let him or her look up at that double arched window in the north side of the tower. It might be Saxon, but I am no authority.

We met a nice woman in the church yard and gossiped with her. She told us that the old glass had been buried in Cromwell's day and had never been found, and that a new search for it might be made. I looked at tombstones. I could spend hours looking at tombstones, and here I discovered two most unusual and stimulating names —Forehead and Bravery. They seemed to

suit this most English village and church, though I should say that England had less forehead than bravery.

A path leads down to the Tillybourne. Shere is all Tillybourne. An old oak plank bridge crosses it, the timber cut in the rough from the tree. These great oak boards suggested the old saw pit, and Top Sawyer and a Bottom Sawyer. The inferior gentlemen received all the sawdust. What was the moral of that ?

We looked at the antique shop, and the old Malt House with its wisteria. We strolled along by the Tillybourne. A notice hung here — “ Ladies and Gentlemen’s Tailor.” What were the Shere fashions ?

I saw the funny old flint and timber cottage with its projecting upper level. The place itself was a picture, and its garden gay with polyanthus. Everything was green and rich about us, and in the moist bottom beyond the stream, kingcups were ablaze.

But to digress. The Shere had a famous family named Bray. One — William Bray wrote a history of Surrey, and at the age of 78 he edited John Evelyn’s memoirs from the original Wolton M.S.S. Great old gentleman ! Both Forehead and Bravery here.

In the Parrish Register are two names that intrigued me.

1617 Carbetia Hall — Gentlewoman.

1621 Servilla Bircoe of Abinger.

Coo ! Carbetia ! She should have been a formidable lady, a toe-the-line-man martinet.

And Servilla ! Was she sweet and servile ?

I have never known of these Christian names before.

Well, we were looking at willows and kingcups and rich green growth and apple blossoms and the majestic wooded downs above, and we crossed the footbridge over the Tillybourne, and climbing the steep old trackway, saw the house. It looked grey and aloof and somehow desolate, a mystery house,

one of those mansions where the Hitler would have his lair. How many such dead houses are there in England now, staff-less, with gardens going wild, deserted even by the army ?

Who had lived there ? Who would want to live there again ? It always made me a little sad to think of these so English houses left derelict by the work of the Time Sea. An obsolete tradition, and way of living. They seem dead - these houses and instead we are expecting a vast litter of Pastel coloured pups.

Progress — so called — may be right and inevitable, but I have a fear that it is going to be dammed ugly.

As for the communal idea, it fills me with nausea.

Shere is not communal. It is packed with individuality. And I thought — as I looked back along the valley, that dying and being buried here would be so right and natural. One would be but one of the village's many returned to the good earth while life went on, and a fruit tree flowered, and the great hills raised their serene foreheads to the light.

CHAPTER 4

Pyford - Newark - Mill on Wey

ASSUREDLY — life is most lovely when it surprises us. Oh, hoary platitude ! Yet, some of the platitudes are like pleasant and peaceful corners in some country place grown unfamiliar in the rage and restlessness of war, to be rediscovered with a catch of the breath and a feeling that strange old things may be somehow good.

As I have said before — I seemed — after all these years of immobility — to have developed a peculiar aptitude for losing myself and Stella. It was she — poor darling — who had had map-sense and a road-sense — and an eye for the signposts, and signposts were still in many places non-existent.

I got lost that day in the Woking-Byfleet area. Who would not ? How many souls must have lost themselves in Woking ! I went this way and I went that. The world's Wokings are so very much alike.

Stella must have divined my lostness by the hesitations and stoppings and backups. She did not say, " Why not ask ? " Stella had a peculiar understanding of the queer thing called man. Moreover, had we not agreed that half the fun would be searching and getting lost.

I came — at last — upon a familiar and unforgettable house, tall, Georgian, many windowed, with a brick wall leaning over against supporting buttresses and a great clipped yew in the garden. Why — of course — I knew this house, but the road — as I remembered had ended in nothingness, a farm trackway and fields. But dead-ends and Die Hards pass in this new world, and very new it was. I was somehow sorry for the old house. I suppose the new mansions would have mocked at it, as at a Die Hard, but it seemed very much alive to me. I took off my hat to it, climbed back into the car, and told Stella what I had seen.

“ Try the new road, John.”

Oh — these new roads, and these social adaptations ! I am one of those silly wretches who like the old as it was. Stout beer, solid oak furniture, and no new synthetic landscapes and planned communal — groupy — groupy madness ! Oh — God love a duck !

I took the new road, floundered along, and in due course — how I do not know — came upon what I sought — old Pyford church, and its church house set upon this little hill above the Wey meadows. I parked Moses in the shade, for the sun had amazing strength in this most amazing Spring.

“ Like to get out, — darling ? ”

She nodded. I helped her out, and with her hand in mine, led the way to the gate, and on this marvellous morning it hurt me to think that she could not see this England as it was.

Suddenly she paused.

“ The yew — John.”

So, she remembered, and felt the shadow of the great yew which trailed its branches on the ground.

“ Yes, just as it was.”

“ Let’s sit.”

We sat, utterly alone in that peaceful place amid the old and revered dead. The splendid brick and timber porch gaped at us. The squat timber spire caught the sunlight.

“ Shall I say my lesson, John ? ”

“ How much do you remember of St. Nicholas ? ”

“ Roman — twelfth cell century. The dog-toothed doorway. That little lancet window under the tower, where the old grit stone they used — shows. All correct ? ”

“ I’ll go and see.”

I went and came back to her.

“ Good girl. The porch door is locked.”

“ Never mind.”

“ There were paintings on the walls.”

“ Yes, and memories of old John Donne who stole Anne More from Loseley Park. I wonder if he liked his Anne ? ”

II

PRESENTLY, we drove on, down the steep little hill, and to the right where the road dips and winds to the Wey Meadows. I'm losing myself — I had found what I wanted. Over there rose the grey ruins of Newark Abbey, where Doone had presided in the old days and bathed in the river. And so we came to the Mill and the multitude of waterways, and a certain newness that puzzled me.

So, I had three gems all in one case, St. Nicholas Pyford Church, distant Newark, and the Mill. And what a Mill ! It was silver grey like old oak, for the paint had suffered, and with its brown tiled roof, its colouring was perfect. I had pulled up, and I wandered on a little way to an old brick bridge, and a stretch of water that ran straight like a moat beside the mill house garden. A great weeping beech was just coming into leaf.

I stood at gaze, suddenly breathless with the beauty of the vista, and the clarity of this brilliant morning ! What was at the back of my mind ? I was grasping. Why of course, John Constable and Valley Farm. This English scene was pure Constable, green with all the greenness of an English spring.

I went back for Stella. I wanted her to stand on that bridge and feel the scene as I saw it, and so we stood, leaning together against the brick wall. I wondered how much her blindness hurt her.

“ Is it very lovely, John ? ”

“ Very.”

“ Just where are we ? ”

“ There are supposed to be seven water-ways here, including the canal. A bit of a puzzle. We are under that old weeping beech.”

“ Oh — yes, I remember. The mill is over there to the left, and that pleasant Victorian house nearer. And a straight piece of water.”

“ Right, oh — Queen, straight as straight, and all flicking with light and shadows, and silver and green and brown.”

“ I don’t think I have ever seen anything so green as that green bank. And there are yellow flowers, and everything is as still as still.”

Her fingers closed on mine.

“ Listen.”

“ Yes, water.”

We could hear the rush and swish and chuckle of falling water from the spill-over somewhere behind us.

“ Isn’t it loving it, John ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ Listen. There is something else.”

“ Yes, peewits over there in the meadows.”

We loitered there a while, and I watched her face. It was luminous and happy, almost as though she could see it all. There are mysteries beyond the mind of man, and her inward sensing of that which she could not see with mortal eyes was always to be a marvel to me, but as I looked at her, a blaze of the old anger flared up in me. That accursed country, and that monstrous little megalomaniac ! I could wish that all Germany should be blind with weeping.

Presently I led her back into the sunlight opposite the grey mill and its pools. Could anything be more peaceful than this old timber building towering up above the placid water ? Somehow it was timeless, and a symbol

of the good things man did and should do. Corn to be ground, corn from the fruitful earth. And over there rose the gray ruin of Newark Abbey where the jackdaws loved to build. That too had been good and fruitful in its day. All this was part of England that had been and might yet be.

I left her for a moment to look at the new sluices. All part of the Way Drainage scheme. There were nice metal plaques advertising the improvements, nor could I quarrel with these innovations. Surely no two rivers could be more wayward and procrastinatory than these Surrey rivers — the Wey and the Mole. No haste, no Roman straightness here, but a delightful wilfulness, and “I go as I please” spirit. “Thank you, I am in no hurry to reach either Father Thames or the sea.”

I noticed a little green hut here and questioned its validity. “Get thee behind me, Snack Bar !” How could any impudent shack face that stately mill ? But I had noticed certain reassuring inscriptions by the sloping entry to the mill house. “No Parking here.” — “Cars not to be reversed here.” — Excellent ! I applauded these good people, and accepted their demand for peace. With old memories of Newlands Corner and the Litter Louts and the motoring mob who would not pay sixpence to be in the car park, but most spill themselves and their messes all over the sweet turf. I could understand that the dwellers on this peaceful place might be passionately determined to keep it so.

I strolled back to Stella.

“Want to go on, my sweet.”

“Oh — no. I’m just soaking it all in. Funny — I’m blind in a city street, but here —— ”

I put my arm round her.

“That’s good. I was so afraid when we began these adventures —— ”

“That I’d be hurt ? ”

“Yes, just that.”

I saw her smile. There was something strange and mysterious about that sightless smile of hers.

“ Does - the country hurt one ever ? Who was it who spoke of the bitter streets ? ”

“ Gilbert Murray, if I remember.”

“ There is no bitterness here. Even my skin seems to have eyes.”

CHAPTER 5

Wisley - Ockham

TO those who are garden-minded, Wisley is just Wisley, the R.H.S. county headquarters, research and experimental station. Wisley has a church and a Commons, the former supposed to be the smallest in Surrey, the second very much in a state of nature, and if a Commons is capable of blushing, Wisley should feel contrite under the gaze of the severe and towering red mansion on the hill above. There is a moment in Spring when this self-same red brick dowager may put on a veil of lavender and appear less formidable and haughty. I have seen the front of the house one splendour of wisteria.

I am a member of the R.H.S. — a very humble member, and as I drove Stella along the straight road, I did not tell her that much of the heathland on the right of the road had become mud. Tanks had been here, and the rough ground and little hillocks had provided army motor-cyclists with a test track. There had been much felling of timber — Scotch Firs, but the groups of trees on the little hills had been spared. Someone with a sense of landscape must have been in charge of the job.

Poor Scotch Firs ! To be one during the war was to be doomed, unless you happened to be in a private garden and could spread your thumb and fingers over a fence. Yet, as I have said, the felling here had been done with discrimination, and in many places the cutting had improved the view. The wild county was much as ever, with the old thorns in full flower. I was glad to see that the trees on the little hill where the road runs to Effingham had been spared or thinned, and that a vista had been cut beside it. This hill has always suggested to me a great barrow as a Toot Hill. Often I have sat upon it in contemplation, while the car-crowd rushed to and fro on the road below.

Today all was peace. The same trees stood parading by the Hut Pool, and the pool itself still displayed the bunch of muck islands which — I suppose — were intended as camouflage. Could a Hun plane have landed there? The Hut Inn appeared to be taking a holiday. Not a car reposed on the cindered parking-place by the water.

II

SO, we came to Wisley and to my surprise the parking-place under the oaks had grassed itself over, and the view had spread into a distant greenness of birch trees. A certain gloom had gone from the place. I entered the little hut to sign my name in the visitor's book, for this was a singular and state occasion, but the pens were not welcoming. There were three of them, and two of them were cross-eyed, but the third allowed me to make some sort of scrawl.

I took Stella's arm and we passed in and round by the great red brick house with its tall chimneys. I saw that the young mimosas had been killed by the cold winter; it looked sufficiently dead. So, we came to the glass-houses, where the nectarines were the size of size of hen's eggs. An old aristocrat of a gardener was standing here.

I said that the nectarines looked well, and how much did they get for them?

"Three and six each," said he.

He was a handsome, shrewd old man, and I asked him how things were going. He said that much of the labour was young lads straight from school, and completely undisciplined. He added that if you set one lad at work in one spot and another half a mile away, they appeared to be drawn together as by a magnet to gossip and smoke cigarettes.

"Give me nothing under forty," said I.

He nodded.

“ You can leave an old man on the job, sir and He'll stick at it steadily, and you know the job's all right — But these young fellows —— ! ”

“ Yes, youth and maturity never see eye to eye. An old man can love the job; youth can love everything but the job. One must not expect too much steadfastness from the young.”

III

NOW — I have a terrible confession to make. As I led Stella to where she could smell the azaleas, and divine their almost brittle brilliancy, I remembered that there had been occasions where Wisley had both bored and irritated me. I would have preferred it in the Wilson days when it was the garden of a great lover and collector of plants. Should I be bored on this exceptional occasion ? We wandered to one of the pools, and then along the broad grass way of the arboretum. I will confess that the conception and the lay-out are fine and stately, but every conifer we passed seemed to smirk at me and say “ You didn't know me, do you ? — You are an ignorant fellow. You had better come and read my label.”

Now, there was one conifer which I did know — “ *Cupressus Assamica Comica*.” It is the loveliest of the blue cypresses, swift in growth, compact and hardy, and as it happened, we had two specimens which were much finer than the Wisley one.

I said so. I told the tree it was a somewhat ragged specimen, which was petty of me, but already this live museum was beginning to irritate me.

Was it sheer, silly egoism ?

“ Let's sit.”

We sat, for Wisley knows how to place a seat.

Said Stella, “ You weren't very kind to the poor tree.”

I agreed with her. I said that I would go and apologize to Assamica and I did so, but the vague feeling of irritation was still with me.

Again, we wandered along the path where the Polyantha Roses live and round to the rock garden. It was all very scenic and lovely, but it seemed to be packed with plants bearing prodigious and fantastic names. Somehow it wasn't nature — a garden that was restful to the eye. There might have been a loud-speaker shouting botanical questions at you, while an invisible pedant pelted you with labels.

Only one tree did I see that pleased my petulant self. It was a large Snowy Mespilus growing in the grassy hillside, and it was labelled.

There has always been debate about the Mespilus and their varieties. This was Canadenis, and in the woods about our home Canadenis had naturalized itself, and grew wild. I have never seen it do so elsewhere.

I was quite excited.

"Ours — is — Canadenis, Stella. Sadler was wrong when he called it Laevis."

"Oh — incorrigible boy!" I think Stella must have smiled at me.

We had climbed to the Alpine House when she spoke those significant words.

"What is irritating you, John?"

How quick she was. I laughed.

"Labels, my dear and I suppose my own damned ignorance. You can't look at anything here without having a label poked at you."

She pressed my arm.

"Let's go on to a place where there are no labels."

Before we departed, I have two little stories to tell of a head-gardener here who was Scotch.

Stella had asked him one day how to get rid of a Canadian Pond-Weed and he had mused a while and then he had said, "I think it would be easier to

get sin out of the world.” Another time I had remarked to him of the peaceful emptiness of the garden and the crashing crowd on the Portsmouth Road. I had said how strange it was that none of them turned aside to visit Wisley. All that he had said was — “ Perhaps it’s as weel.”

IV

WE were bound for Ockham church. It stands in Ockham Park and I thought I knew the lanes, but the church eluded me. I pulled up by some cottages where the roads meet, and went wandering and suddenly peace returned to me. What a restful English scene was this, with the great trees of the park and the infinite greenness of everything, and sunlight and silence. No labels here, no museum pieces. It was just English parkland and farmland in the spring of the year, rich and untainted and unfretted. I wandered up the lane and caught sight of the little church among the trees, and turning went back for Stella and the car.

We parked by a farm cottage and took the rough track on the right, and then I saw the cedars, and I remembered. No finer cedars can be seen anywhere than those of Ockham Park, with their great dark green leaves and splendid trunks. Ahead of us and to the left one had glimpses of that queer, Italianate house with its Byronic associations.

Stella seemed to divine the shadow of these great trees.

“ Cedar, John ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ I remember them.”

But there was a certain air of desolation here and I understood it when I saw hacked shrubs and army huts. Ockham had not escaped the war. The place looked deserted, the church a dead building, but I gathered that it is a very live one. I stood and looked. The blue clock in the tower struck

a note of colour. The building had features which were singular to me, the layers of red tiles washed into the buttresses and angles, and the queer stone work of the tower, both vertical and longitudinal.

The church door was locked. I had wanted to see the tomb of the "Kings", but I did not feel like hunting up the church boy. The first of the Kings was the son of an Exeter grocer, who came to London and died Lord Chancellor, a career that would have been exasperating to our Modern Levellers. But what of Mr. Bevin and Mr. Morrison? You may — in — envy — plan the redistribution of wealth, but how can you arrange for the redistribution of brains?

I am afraid we did some trespassing, and poked our noses where privacy prevailed, though privacy is becoming somewhat of a forbidden larceny. We did not see a living soul, and no one challenged us.

This un-English house has always intrigued me. Byron's daughter, who married Lord Lovelace, lived here and I have always sensed a Byronic influence in the house's make-up, but the Great Dame who is my authority tells me that it is not so. She says that the house was built in the early Georgian period, and that Byron's daughter was most un-Byronic. She had not cause to love her father, but she inherited brains. In fact she was a most brainy lady, a mathematician and what not, and would have functioned most successfully in the new trousered world. I have seen her portrait in the Great Dame's house, and I was not attracted. She looked to me both plain and smug, a dreadful combination.

V

NOW for Ockham Common and the old Signal Tower! On the way we looked in at the Hartboy Inn to discover if they could give us dinner later. The polite and fastidiously clean Claude was there in his white jacket and

when I saw the tables with their good glass and polished cutlery and silver, I realised that this was no "Take it or leave it" show. Good Business ! Claude was a man who could feel pride in his job, and not assume that he was demeaning himself by giving service.

It is the inferior man who feels inferior.

"Can you dine us, Claude ?"

"With pleasure, sir."

"Good," said I, "there is something in a tradition."

How many people who rush down the Portsmouth Road know of the Semaphore Tower standing in strange isolation among the pines and heather ? I remember that when I first set eyes on it — while wondering around the woods, I was astonished and puzzled. What the devil was this tall red brick Tower of Babel doing there ? Chancing upon an old country fellow, I sought knowledge, and he, regarding me as an ignoramus, put me right. I explored the place. In shape, it was like an engine with a monstrous funnel. And it was inhabited. When I climbed the steps and knocked at the green door, a pleasant woman welcomed me.

She showed me some of the signalling gear that was still in place, and advised me to climb to the leads and enjoy the view. And — by Jove — what a view ! You felt yourself sailing among the tree tops.

This signal service was initiated in the Napoleonic period and Admiralty messages were passed from Portsmouth to London and vice-versa. The signalling mechanism was in the form of a shuttered board and not like a railway signal arm. As far as I can discover, there were stations on Patney Hill, Ockham, Netty Heath and the North Downs, Guildford, Hascombe and Blackdown Hill.

Cobbett mentions a semaphore on the Hog's Back and curses it, much as he cursed Hindhead and this and the Guildford station leads one to conclude that the system may have been doubled, for Ockham would signal to Netty,

Guildford being off the direct route. I understand that not all the stations were towered, but may have been timber structures. Each one was manned by a naval officer and two seamen.

There are two ways of reaching the Ockham Tower, one by the lane turning left off the Portsmouth Road opposite Foxwarren, the other by a path off the Effingham road just short of the Hut Pool. In both cases you have to leave your car and climb. We came to our starting point that day by way of Martyr's Green and Hatchford. There used to be white posts at the opening of the track, but they had disappeared. I gathered that timber had been pulled out by way of this track.

I did not like the idea of leaving "Moses" unguarded here, and it was a rough and longish walk, so Stella remained in the car, and I took the black soiled track alone. It is a most attractive wood-way, but I had not gone ten yards when I saw smoke drifting through the woods ahead of me and a little fringe of fire among the trees. I went on to explore. There had been a most extensive heath fire here. There were acres of blackened soil, with drifts and swirls of smoke still rising from it. The fire had reached its limits, and was no more than a curling, flickering edge amid the brambles and the bracken. Great trees stood scorched and marooned in the black waste, and on the further edge I saw a wood of young birches sad and seared by the flames.

These heath and woodland fires have always angered me, for in nine cases out of ten, they appear to be caused by some urban fool with a cigarette end, or by some silly picnic fire. No doubt in some instances they are caused wantonly by boys or by idiots who imagine they are flouting some capitalist by setting alight to trees and heather. The theory that they are caused by broken bottle-glass acting as a burning-glass does not impress me. And even if that theory is valid — who left the broken bottles there?

I remember many years ago joining in an attempt to control such a fire.

It was on Patch Hill. A young friend and I had gone tramping and had engaged a lunch with much beer, and were preparing to sleep in the heather when an excited estate agent passed by.

“Come on” said he, “help me with this fire.”

And what a blaze it was ! It happened to be a hot day, and we broke off birch branches and set to work trying to beat out the flames, but it was a hopeless job. A high wind was blowing and the blaze singed through the heather and bracken and the trees. I remember one Scotch Fir going up in flames like a huge torch. After a while we reached our helplessness and surrendered to the inevitable, hot and sweating and with our faces sooty.

Said my young friend, “I’d like to catch the fool who started that fire, and beat his backside blue.”

My young friend is now commanding a battery in Italy and having a great time chasing Germans.

I left that charred and reeking place and strolled on and towards the Tower. There had been much felling here, but from the high ground the view now was more spacious and more green. The old tower is a very secret place, hiding amid the trees. You come upon it quite suddenly, its redness lit by the sun. Yes, there it was in a smother of green, unharmed by the war. The old straggling laurels still hedged its garden and orchard. I strolled up to the gate and a dog barked at me. I heard children’s voices, and I left the tower to the dog and the youngsters. Peaceful sounds in there. Stella and dinner called me, and I returned to the car.

So, we dined at the “Hartboy”, served by the good Claude. The old lounge had been turned into a dining room and the mock baronial hall above closed for the rest of the war. I gathered that the “Hartboy” had once been the home of the Lovelace agent, and the baronial hall had served as an estate office, or assembly room. Meanwhile the lounge was sunny and warm, and the dinner — for a war dinner — excellent.

Afterwards we sat in the Annex bar and drank our coffee and smoked. The place was empty, save for two young women khaki consuming sandwiches, but I had glimpses of the lads of the village in the public bar drinking war beer.

A large man and a little lady came in and sat down on high stools. The fatherly barman came to attend to them.

“No gin, no whisky.”

Dear, dear, what a problem !

Something that was called orange whisky appeared to be available. What the devil is orange-whisky ?

My feeling was that I would prefer to remain in ignorance and innocence when such liquor is flaunting around.

So, we trundled home, passing on our way a poor little cottage in a wood that had been sat upon by a Flying Bomb. What a dishevelled and pathetic mess it was and the ragged trees ! And not much more than a hundred yards away, a bomb had dug a large crater close to another cottage. A second bomb had lifted a full grown oak bodily out of the ground. The craters were now a small ponds.

In the field between, Shetland ponies had grazed, and came to the fence to be petted.

There were no ponies here now. I wondered what had become of them. And the field was not grass but wheat.

VI

HERE it behoves me to interpolate two glimpses of Surrey. Ockham Mill and Wisley Church.

The English spring, which had given us a heat-wave a week ago was now cursing and hailing. We drove down the narrow lane to Ockham Mill in a

sudden scurrying of wind and wetness. The Mill House garden was on show, and being unique in its way, should be seen by all who have the opportunity. The mill itself is a bastardly building in what I have come to describe as Ockham red-brick Gothic, or Romanesque — I you prefer it, but the old Mill House is a gem with its deep colour, great white doors, and generous windows.

Water — water everywhere, little bridges, a wild floweriness, old millstones sunk in the ground, a green gondola laying derelict upon a grassy bank. Here is a natural garden — a beautiful disorder that is not so disorderly as it seems. There was one particular vista that delighted me. Looking back from the main path you saw a green grey cypress and the rich redness of the old house, wisteria in flower, the stone terrace, and beyond it all a vast copper beech in young leaf against a blue black sky that might have promised thunder.

Yes, here was an ideal water garden with the great pool lying almost in the midst of it, and channels of water talking to themselves. The Mill House hens were segregated on a kind of little island of their own. The wild plant that pleased me best was blue clematis — brilliant in a mass of greenery. Cows came to gaze at us across one of the water-ways — friendly cows.

Across the road are the farm, and Millwater House — at the moment an infectious hospital. Dear, dear ! Measles and scarlet fever in this peaceful spot. Old cottages stand grouped about the water. And high above one towers that bastard of a mill. How much better would the scene be without it.

Walking back along the lane I saw an old trackway dipping down and I followed it across a footbridge over a tiny brook and suddenly the deep track broadened out between a holly hedge and a mass of blackthorn. I became excited. Surely I had discovered an old an forgotten road ? The

way swung round into an oak avenue, and then — with mocking wilfulness — ended at another footbridge over a brook. I crossed it and saw a great flat field, a little path, and Ripley in the distance. What had been the history — if any — of this two hundred yards or so of this old roadway? I must consult the local expert in archaeology. Incidentally, it was he who told me of a grim find on Ockham Common. It was that of a skeleton, completely clothed in the garments of a tramp. The man had died there in the heather and not so long ago. But how had all his flesh disappeared? The answer was — ants.

Just across the second footbridge I noticed a stretch of ground which puzzled me, last year's dead bracken-fronds, a few young birch trees and furze bushes, and a charred stump of a tree. The peculiar thing was that not a live fern frond was showing. No, not one, though elsewhere they were a foot high. Now — why? Was this patch of ground somehow an accursed spot? In the old days one would have postulated magic and malignity.

I turned back and on my way I noticed a triangular piece of ground sunk below the level of the trackway. It suggested ancient human activities. Had this been brick earth here or a quarry? It seemed too shallow for the quarrying of stone.

I found Stella dreaming in the car. Had I left her alone too long?

“Not feeling cold, darling?”

“No — I have been smelling that garden all over again.”

For, even on this chilly day the scents of the place had been alive to her.

VII

WISLEY CHURCH and the Church Farm. What an austere little building is this with its timbered spire, and gray stuccoed walls through which the local stone showed like lava. The place had been restored some seventy

years ago and the reproduced Roman doorway had a cold unfriendliness. The Roman work within was plain and pleasant. What was the seating capacity of this tiny place? How intimate and austere was its atmosphere.

As I turned the car homewards, I saw another church spire — grey shingled — rising among the trees. What church was that? Ockham? It looked like it, but surely Ockham did not lie over yonder? Yet, what other church could it be? The narrow road winds so much over Wisley Common that once can lose one's sense of direction.

I pulled up and walked over the common. There had been much felling of timber here — Scotch Fir, and the thing that intrigued me was the sight of hundreds of young Scotch firs growing gallantly where their ancestors had flourished. Brave little fellows!

VIII

BESIDE the road linking up the Portsmouth Road and the Cobham-Byfleet road are three great enormities — war factories. Many trees must have been felled to make room for these hideous buildings. To what use will they be put when this foul business is over? It is nearly over, or will they be pulled own and re-erected elsewhere? I know that they had their use and that all the many things that we have had suffered were due to own silly blindness, but I cannot help hating these monstrosities. Yet, I have another memory which chastens me. It is of a crowd of men in khaki with green leaves round their steel helmets pouring suddenly out of the Foxwarren Woods. I was hiking here just before the landing in Normandy, and these brown tough men were at the war games and keeping fit.

Where are many of them — now?

Assuredly is it childish to grouse at a few blots on the landscape when

other men have had to die. Beastliness — begets beastliness, and any beastliness that remains with us can be credited to Brother Boche.

CHAPTER 5

Chertsey - St. Anne's Hill - Chertsey Mill

THESE wicked English Springs ! We had arranged to drive through Chertsey, explore St. Anne's Hill and dine at the old Chertsey Mill, but snow came, a sleet, and a bitter north wind. There was snow on the grass, snow on the white thorns and on the chestnuts that were in flower. The red thorns were powdered white, and broad beans which were in blossom, had their noses to the ground. I must confess that at my mature age, I loathe snow. It is for the young and hearty, and I am neither.

If England is ever perfidious, it is in her Springs. A marvellous March, and a heat wave in April, and now — this — blizzard on the last day of April. Well, well, well — I rather expected it. The English weather is pure Hardy in its cold inevitability, and in its mocking of the activities of man.

So, since " Moses " has to remain in his garage for a day or two, let me be mildly historical.

Chertsey, Chertsey Meads, Chertsey Bridge, memories of the Abbey which was one of the greatest religious houses in the kingdom.

Chertsey's particular fame at the moment appears to be that it is the home of the Chase Continuous Cloche, an admirable invention. We use it greatly, and enjoy the early potatoes and peas and strawberries that these miniature glass-houses produce. I have found that they give better results than a garden frame. But I had one gardener who — in the matter of cloches — was like a bull in a china shop. If he could tread on one, he did so. If he could drop one, or drop something on one, the day was a success.

Chertsey Meads are for a warm day in summer, when both river and meadows are serene and warm. The old grey bridge is stately and attractive. Incidentally — the Meads were the recipient of our nearest rocket. This

old house jumped up and sat down again ! The beastly thing dug a huge crater, and that was all. We rang up friends who lived that way to ask if they had suffered. All that had happened was that two or three jars of jam had been blown off a shelf and smashed upon the floor. Quite a minor tragedy in these jamless days.

As to the Abbey, it was founded in 666, and built of timber. The Danes sacked and burnt it about 870. King Edgar rebuilt it. It was rebuilt again by Abbot Hugh of Winchester early in the 12th Century, a great man and a great house. It had all the privilege of such an institution, among them rights of women, liberty of the fox chase. The monks could keep dogs and take hares and foxes. Only the very privileged could keep dogs in those days.

The monks must have fared well. Egham sent them 50 fat hogs a years, Cobham 130. Byfleet provided 325 eels, Petersham 1000 eels and 1000 lampreys.

Nothing is left of the Abbey. It was famous for its tiles, and some time ago our expert, Dr. Eric Gardener, discovered the kiln, and a number of tiles which were unique. Some of these depicted the scenes of Tristan and Iseult, and one of them was particularly realistic. Iseult was dressing Tristan's wounded thigh. The wound was septic, and smelling so, and Iseult was holding her nose !

At the Old Porch House somewhere in the south street lived Abraham Cowley, poet laureate under Charles II. He was a great gardener and would have welcomed Mr. Chase. His end was abrupt and somewhat tragic. One summer evening he went out to help the haymaker, perhaps on Chertsey Meads, got soaked with sweat and a sudden heavy dew, caught cold and died. His coffin was floated down the Thames to Westminster Abbey.

Another and more tragic corpse travelled in the other direction. Poor Henry VIth, murdered at the Tower, was brought up the river and buried in

the Abbey.

Chertsey had two Fairs.

“ Black Cherry ” on August 6.

“ Goose and Onion ” on September 26.

It was also the custom to ring the Curfew Bell between Sept 29 and March 25.

The date of “ Black Cherry ” Fair is peculiar. Was it merely a day in the calendar, or did the black cherries ripen so late ? We are enthusiastic growers of cherries, and I found the trees somewhat temperamental, especially so a very early variety which grows with others in our cold-fruit-house. All sweet cherries are self-sterile, and this particular tree — Belle de St. Trane — is so early that in some years there is no other tree in flower for which to take the pollen. It is a job for the brush, but this year a black cherry was out in blossom and we have berries ready to eat on the first day of May.

I divide my cherries into Brunettes and Blonds. Belle de St. Trane is a blond. I confess to preferring the Brunettes, both in cherries and the fair sex !

There are fragments of Chertsey which have colour and flavour, but modern Chertsey is rather obvious and depressing. I know that the modern cottage and the modern villa are hygienic and all that — but — dear God — their faces are so all alike and so lacking in individuality. Yet, Chertsey is preferable to its neighbour — Addlestone. I have christened that village Addled Egg. The one thing that stimulates me is that Fanny Kimble's mother was buried in Addlestone Churchyard. I have searched for the grave, but have been unable to find it. The inscriptions on many of the stones are indecipherable.

Addlestone also possesses the most exasperating level-crossing it has been my misfortune to meet. Hardly ever are the gates open when you drive

that way, and the road must be littered with bad language.

But Addlestone does possess one of the happiest souls it has been my lot to meet, Mr. Eacott, raiser and grower of choice flowers. I have cursed the level-crossing and blessed Mr. Eacott. He is one of those men who make the world seem better than Addled Egg.

II

CHERTSEY'S most historic figure is that of Charles James Fox, who retreated at the end of a stormy political career to a home and estate on St. Anne's Hill. Those who have read the life of that ugly, insolent gambler and debaucher, must marvel at the Arcadian simplicity of his later years. Yet, the moral of it is that Charles James Fox had become wise in his philosophy and in his love for the country and for simple things. He would roll on the green and play with his dogs, sit and listen to the nightingales, talk turnips with the farmers, and cultivate his garden. When they sought to drag him up to London to some debate in the House, he rather refused to leave his beloved refuge, or went willingly, for he was a sick man. Those who have seen the film of Pitt the Younger, must remember the almost bloated figure of this brilliant man, and that glimpse of him carrying a musket with the Chertsey volunteers.

III

ST. ANNE'S HILL lies about a mile from Chertsey, and to the west. Fox's house stood on the southern slope. There used to be a most marvellous view from the hill, over Surrey and into Middlesex. It is said that St. Albans could be seen from it, Windsor Castle, Hampton Court, and St. Martha's chapel. I question the last statement. Later, the hill was planted with

pinces, and much of the view blotted out as the trees grew. Cooper's Hill had also been planted, and so shut out of the view of Windsor Castle. In certain lights, the Crystal Palace, St. Pauls, and the Westminster Cathedral Towers were said to be visible.

IV

NOW for a confessional, sackcloth and ashes. The moral is "Don't believe old books. Go and see for yourself!" I pulled up in Chertsey and explored. I wanted to find the Old Porch House where Cowley lived and died. I found a row of shops opposite a large and fine old home where broken windows made it look decayed and suggestive. Included in the row of shops was one occupied by Mr. Chase, with interesting exhibits of the products of cloche culture among the ripe strawberries. I crossed the road and was about to explore the garden on approval of the derelict house opposite when I met two working men wheeling out their bikes. I appealed to them. Could they tell me where I could find the Old Porch House?

More surprises. One of the working men gave me an exasperative glance. He looked a tough customer.

"Over the street — there."

"But I don't see — "

"No you wouldn't. That's where the old house was. They pulled it down. All those shops are on the site. Yes, it was the Cowley house."

So this rough fellow knew of Cowley the poet! Surprising — but good. And Mr. Chase was exhibiting his products on the sacred and veritable Cowley site. The coincidence piqued me. Cowley, Chase and Co., historic and associated in their botanical enthusiasms.

How chastening for one's little complacencies! One of my authorities had stated that the Cowley house continued to exist. It didn't. Moreover,

I found myself washed in host of apologies. Often I had driven through Chertsey with a motorist's casualness, but now I lingered. Moral for all motorists who would see England as it is — "Get out, stroll, linger, look, use your legs and your eyes."

V

I PAID my respect to the old church and the old houses. The church tower is singular, flint and roughish freestone shingled. At some period a kind of brick hat had been added to it. A most attractive old tower. So is the Churchyard, a green and peaceful precinct. One feature here intrigued me. The church railings had been sacrificed to the war effort, and some of the gravestones and tombs seemed part of the public pavement. The dead had joined up with the living.

I found that one of the old houses was named "Curfew House." And here in the broad roadways the Chertsey Fair had been held, and not on the Meads — as I had imagined. They tell me that the fairs continue to be held here.

VI

SO, on to St. Anne's Hill. And now, I shall have to make my most abject of apologies. I will confess that St. Anne's Hill had been to us nothing but a somewhat ragged tangle of woodland laying on the steep hillside above the road to Thorpe and Virginia Water. We had never visited the real hill.

At the foot of the hill as you approach it from Chertsey, you come suddenly upon a most English scene which might have come straight from Cranford.

Get out and look and look well and lovingly — "The Golden Grove Inn." What a name! You will see a little "Green", an ancient elm, a pond

overlooked by trees, the "Golden Grove Inn" itself with a black barn beside it, and umbrellas of very old ivy sheltering painted tiles.

The inn is red, but across the way is the most charming of little white houses with green doors — wisteria was in flower upon it, and brilliant rose-red rhododendrons. Below it stands a stately house with a covered way, and one wall a mass of wisteria. It is the private home of Mr. Chase. Good luck to him!

I had helped Stella out of the car and I described it all to her. She had to lay her hands on the old elm. We went and poked our noses as closely as we could to the windows of the white house. Its name was St. Anne's Lodge. You had glimpses through it of the garden. Its interior was as charming as its face, and no one appeared to reprove us for our curiosity.

Here the roads fork, the left going to Egham, the right up St. Anne's Hill. I took the hill road, and drove "Moses" slowly up it, keeping an eyes open for a house that might be the Fox home. The lane is like a woodland ride, greened over by tall trees. I saw great cedars in my left and pulled up by some unfriendly looking iron gates. This might be the place. The gates were covered with iron sheeting, but I could peer through, and my exclamation was instant.

"Gosh! What the devil's this?"

For what I saw was like a vast white breadbox, as a large white cheese sitting there blatantly in the sunlight. A house? Yes, a house in the new style, a truncated drain pipe of a house. I knew them in the square variety, cakes of concrete, but this was a surprise to me. I am not an admirer of the soap-box type of architecture and I'm told by the young that I am out-of-date and a Boodle. I prefer to be a Boodle.

I went back and told Stella what I had seen.

"Just like a big cheese, with slits in it."

"Perhaps it's some war-horror, John."

“ No, it's a house all right. And it looks to be sitting on the Fox site.”

I had seen old stuccoed stables beside it. They were not beautiful, but they were better than that abortion of a house.

I wandered in to explore. I could look down through the roads to the meadows below. I climbed a bank, and suddenly I saw a great green hollow like a flat bottomed bowl or dish — truffled and stippled with trees. What had I stumbled upon ? There was a strange secrecy about this lovely dell, and in the bank below I saw an old brick cupola that looked like a Fox summerhouse. I wandered on, and came to a gateway and a lodge and saw two small girls busy with a swing. But for them, the vast green amphitheatre was empty.

A face looked at me through a window. The lodge appeared to be a social building. I knocked at the door and a thin old man opened it. He was the lodge-keeper.

Now I began to discover things. The Fox home was dead, and that Mastello Tower-like white building probably occupied the old site. And this amphitheatre and this tree paradise ? — for paradise it was.

My new friend told me that the whole of St. Anne's Hill, same for a few plots, had been given to the public of Chertsey by Sir William Berry, now Lord Camrose, and that the green amphitheatre had been a waste of brambles until he had it cleared and grassed over as a children's playground.

What a pleasant and gracious gift ! The hill was now controlled by the Chertsey A.D.C.

I had other questions to ask. Could I find the remains of St. Anne's Chapel and the Treasure Stone. And what of the views, which had been so famous. The lodge-keeper gave me directions, but doubted whether I should find either chapel or stone. As to the views they were obtainable only where vistas had been cut through the trees.

I went back for Stella and the car. I told her that we two ignoramus had

lived within a few miles of one of the most perfect spots in Surrey and that the strange beauty of the wooden hill was like something out of Shakespeare — pure *Midsummer Night's Dream*.

I parked the car by the lodge and we set out up a broad, steep path. I have never seen finer trees, beeches, oaks, sequoias, pines, cypresses, sweet chestnuts, mountaineer yews, hollies, all magnificently green with varied greenness. The sunlight splashed through them. The woodland ways had been cunningly conceived, and were easy and pleasant and full of mystery. The surface was strong in places, almost like natural asphalt.

We found the grass banked reservoir above, but we did not find the remains of the chapel or the Treasure Stone. Did it matter? Not a bit. To be here in this most lovely and secret place was sufficient. We did not meet a single soul. These winding ways and woodland paths are infinitely attractive and made the hill seem so much more spacious than it is.

Now, to the views. Avenues had been cut leading down to little walled terraces and from the southern gazebo the whole landscape fled away to the high downs. It was a somewhat dim day as to distances, but I gather that I was looking at the Hog's Back. One detail did not please me. The space below the little terrace had been made a receptacle for litter. Why must people be dirty in so lovely a place and in a place that is their own?

The northern view is all Thames Valley, and nothing like it is so splendid. Dominating it is the Staines gasometer!

But there is one other charming view. I came on it by chance. Between the trees one could see the tower of Chertsey Church, splashed by sudden sunlight in a mist of green. As a vignette it was quite exquisite.

These broad woodland ways were easy for Stella. Moreover, the Spring day had grown less fierce, and there was more sunlight now and much shelter here. As for trees, this hill was like a treasure island and I never tire of looking at trees. One likes to study the individual. I came upon

several splendid Scotch firs, perfect as to bark and light, and spreading their green umbrellas against a blue sky across which masses of white clouds rolled. I discovered the biggest mountain-ash that I had seen — ever, and a dwarf oak that had grown into the queerest of shapes, a three pronged fork — as more fancifully a woodland lyre. In fact, should anyone wish to study trees, let him or her come to St. Anne's Hill.

I wondered who had done the planting, for it had been planned in a most masterfully way.

I gather that in Fox's day the hill was not wooded in this way, for its views were too extensive and tradition speaks of four venerable elms, which were known as Waterloo Elms.

I looked at my watch. Gosh, it was a quarter to seven and we were due to dine at the Mill House at half past seven. We slid away down that sylvan lane, past the Golden Grove, and round to the road to Virginia Water.

St. Anne's Hill loomed above the rich meadows on our left, but a new St. Anne's Hill, a place of aloofness and of peace, save perhaps at weekends !

I ought to mention Lady Hollock, who lived at St. Anne's. Ever a great bird-lover, she made war on the destructive members — crows, jays and rooks. Each year the rooks tried to build and she had them shot. When she died the rooks triumphed.

VII

BEFORE heading to the Mill House, we drove on to Thorpe. I have called Thorpe the Valley of Red Brick Walls, and the great hog-backed wall on the main road is especially imposing. Coldharbour Lane — leading to the church, is a walled along its whole length and on both sides and the great houses that must be there are mysterious and invisible in summer.

Dr. Eric Gardner tells me that he is making most interesting finds in the

Thorpe and Chertsey gravel pits, especially so of primitive pottery. He was passing one day in his car, and he stopped and asked the workmen if they found anything interesting in the gravel.

“Just some old broken pots.”

But old broken pots were treasures to Eric Gardner.

St. Mary's Church of Thorpe church is a fascinating building, and something of a puzzle to the amateur. The red brick tower is delightful, the brick laid in what is known as English bond, which should date it about 1650. Some of the masonry on the south side of the church is puzzling, being a strange mixture of rough stone, brick tile and pebbles patched up together and almost suggesting a earth wall that had been ruinous, and then rebuilt in haste, with any sort of material at hand, to resist a siege.

The interior of the church is equally fascinating — suggesting many gradations. I should have been glad of an expert to decipher it for me. On the right of the chancel is a double arcaded seat for the officiating priests, and the feature that intrigued me was the fact that one seat is higher than the other. I suppose the senior priest occupied the more elevated seat. These are also two piscinas. The windows on the left of the chancel suggest that at one time they were outer windows but are now enclosed by an addition.

It is a dim and mysterious place and I should like to have spent more time here. I was looking at the plain, rounded chancel arch and the rood beam when a dark and nun-like figure swept into the church, genuflected and knelt down to her devotions. This silent drab figure made my presence and my curiosity seem superfluous, and I shipped out quietly, leaving her alone. Yet another puzzle. Where had she come? I discovered afterwards that Thorpe contain a convent and the faint scent of incense should have made me grasp its almost catholic atmosphere. Just beyond the church, a

very old stone gateway leads to a garden and a newish building. So my nun was no ghost. She must have come through that gateway.

VIII

CHERTSEY MILL. Known to the world as Old Mill House, but it is so much more than that. It is kept by a very charming lady and her husband Tom, though I believe that Mr. Honnar is responsible for the wine and the farm. I have had many most excellent dinners here, sometimes in the garden, sometimes in the long, dark beamed old room with its brass and its polished tables and its trophies on the walls. You can hear the mill-stream running almost at your elbow. A delightful place this, especially so on a summer evening, for its atmosphere is peaceful and welcoming.

When you cross the bridge and turn into the farm-yard and you will see "Cochy" on his perch, a most vivacious white cockatoo. As a rule he is friendly and will bump up and down on his perch, and shoot up his yellow plume, and fix you with a beady black eye, but I have known "Cochy" in an aloof mood when he was grumbling about on the ground on some business of his own and had no use for humans. Also, if you are lucky, you may find Tom feeding some most engaging calf.

The Mill was the Manor Mill to which all grain was brought for grinding. The Manor tenants were obliged to bring their corn and pay in money or in kind for the milling.

Candles. Imagine a room lit by candles, and by little lights in old ships lanterns. The polished brass gleams at you. We dammed the cost and drank Burgundy, and heard "Cochy" screaming in the distance. The mill stream slid by close to us under the ghost of its old wheel. I think there was white lilac on the table, and smelling sweet.

We drank to our discovering of St. Anne's Hill.

CHAPTER 7

Chiddingfold - Hambledon

ONCE more, by the map, we went forth in search of contrasts — the hilltop and the village green, and both were there for us.

We took the Guildford by-pass that day, and I will confess that this fine road, more than reconciles me to the roads of the future, if they can be planned as this has been planned. The environs of Guildford have become somewhat of a red mess, but when you sweep under the Hog's Back into the chalky depths, the untarnished landscape is there in sweet splendour. A scenic road — this. Valerians had settled itself in the chalk cliffs and were coming into flower. We swept on past Compton, through Milford and Witley to Chiddingfold and its Green.

I parked "Moses" at the upper end of the Green, and Stella and I wandered down to the pond above the church and found a seat there, passing on our way one of Chiddingfold's most charming homes, the Glebe Home, half hiding itself among the trees.

A lady friend once said to us — "I hate Surrey. It is all stockbroker." Poor dear, she had not seen Surrey, nor had I seen it as I saw it at the end of the war. I had wondered at first how much I should find to write about, only to discover that the subject seemed inexhaustible.

I do not think much of Chiddingfold Church. It does not do justice to the village. The great Green and the old red homes about it are Chiddingfold, so serene, so English. It was a Sunday, and people had come by bus and on bikes to sit and lie on the grass and look. Peace was in the air, and some of the old faces I saw seemed to shine with an inward thankfulness. Here was England in the Spring, untarnished and un-invaded and unconquered. There were lovers idling about, and my prayer was that the new world might be good for them.

I had a feeling — somehow — that I was in Sussex and one was very near to Sussex and the Weald lay with us.

I left Stella on the seat, warming herself in the sunlight and wandered round the Green, looking at the old homes. There is one at the top of the Green which always pleases me greatly. And they seemed to look back at me with steadfast eyes — “Yes, we are here, my friend — we stand as we always stood, old oak, and brick and tile. Maybe we can yet prove ourselves to the new England.”

In my pocket I had a list of the Surrey gardens that were open for the benefit of the Queens Institute of District Nursing. I do not think the general public appreciates what this scheme offers them. On these show days they can see places that would remain invisible but for the good cause of nursing. This is another England, an England that may be passing, and it should be seen before it departs from us. One has heard flippant jokes and little scandalous and envious chatters upon the Stately Homes of England, but stately they are, and splendid, and still secret so far as the unthinking crowd is concerned.

How many motorists have seen Sutton Place, or Loseley Hall, or Albany Park, or Wotton Place, or the Lloyd George estate at Churt? Very few — I imagine. So — I would advise the lovers of England in all its aspects, to look up the list of the gardens that are being shown.

I remember after the last war, passing from the mess the crowd was making of Newlands Corner, to the spacious and the graciousness of Albury. Here was loveliness un-littered and unsoiled, and the contrast provoked me to the writing of a payment article entitled — “Thank God for a Few Dukes!”

We drove on to visit a particular garden that was on show, a very gorgeous garden. There were acres upon acres of rare trees, rhododendrons, azaleas, magnolias, Japanese maples, cherries, and what not, and yet — somehow it had the same effect upon me as Wisley. There

seemed to be too much of it, so that its beauty bordered upon ostentation. Beautiful it was, no doubt, but not with a beauty that I have come to cherish. I would prefer something more intimate and friendly, something that did not bother you with botany. I would rather ramble round a cottage garden where things might be less precious and yet more precious to the gardener.

I did not air my feelings to Stella, for Stella was enjoying scents, and they were many. She had become very sensitive to perfumes and here were bluebells, azaleas, lilacs, thorns, and she was seeing them in smelling them. The grass paths were soft to her feet, and I — was soft to her fancies. Always — she had loved flowers, and it hurt me that she could not see them.

II

HAMBLEDON. You turn off the main road and follow the winding lane uphill past cottages and country homes. If you are walking, there are footpaths leading upwards. I drove as far as the lane to the church, and then we left "Moses" tucked up beside a hedge. A climb it is, and infinitely worthwhile. The lane has been cut deep into the sandstone, and great trees lay graciously on the brink, digging in their claws. There is a short and steep path going more directly, and I had seen a figure climbing it. We met where lane and path join.

I swapped glances with a thick-set rosy faced old countryman with steadfast blue eyes.

I spoke to him — "You have a lovely and peaceful place up here."

He smiled at me, and became our gossip and cicerone.

Hambledon is crowned by its church, its immemorial yews, and by the lovely old house and its buildings. The church is newish, but it suits this high place, pointing its little slated spine skywards. Woods back it

on the south, and a corn field climbs even higher. Our old friend went with us into the churchyard. We must see the two yews.

What trees ! I had never seen such yews, the easterly one even bigger and older than its fellow. Their girth is enormous. Our friend mapped out the view for us. There was the Hog's Back, and Milford lying below. He pointed out Crooksbury Hill, and I saw that its trees still sailed there. Hascombe blocks the view towards Newland's Corner and St. Martha's. There were mansions amid the trees on the other side of the valley and the old fellow named them and their owners, but I was not interested in modern mansions.

He had something else to show us, the graves of a child and grownups who had been killed by German bombs. It seemed strange that they should have been killed in this isolated place, and sad that they should be lying there on this Spring day with victory in the air.

The Church bell had begun to toll and our old friend left us, to enter the church. We stood together near the stone wall.

Then, Stella said a thing which astonished me, because just the same impression had come to me.

"I feel that the sea is down there."

Yes, that is the very feeling that I had, that the little church was perched upon a headland, and that the valley held the sea.

III

WE went back by way of the path and here we passed a most prodigious beech tree with roots that were like lengths of grey and writhing snakes. Obviously, this giant determined to hold his own on this high and windy place.

I had yet another glimpse of the England of yesterday. A narrow path climbs across a corn field and two girls were coming up the path to the

church. A very simple picture, and yet significant — Corn in England, the Lord Jesus Christ. England had forgotten how to walk through wheat fields when the wheat is young, or tall and blue throated or tawning towards the harvest, but the war has brought back life to the land. God grant that it may continue. Which plough-wisdom reminds me of another detail which might be recorded here. We Englishers did not know the colour of our soil in Surrey. I remember being astonished at seeing such red ploughland south of Puttenham. It made me think of Devon.

IV

DRIVING towards Godalming we came suddenly upon a lovely home, and I had to get out and look. It stood behind a high wall, with blue gates, double gabled with a little dormer window in between. Veritable Queen Anne. The walling was unusual, red brick and old stone, and into the mortar, stipules of local stone were worked in the old Surrey fashion. Copper gutters for drip ran across its façade.

It bore initials and a date:

E
E I
MDCCX

What a pity that the old houses cannot speak and tell us their history!

A little further I saw a square structure with a part of the wall fallen and the old gate with it. Had the little walled enclosure been the village cattle-pound?

CHAPTER 8

Some Meanderings Of The Mole

AND the Sage said " Let us be historical." My instant response was " Cuckoo to that ! "

Is it that we are more puckish than our forefathers, or more easily bored ? Have we lost all respect for tradition, or is it that we prefer to make tradition our own ? Personally, I prefer to conduct my own discussions, and if they pique me, I may explore their past, and that is how this book is written, and for those who chose self-conducted tours.

It is better to use your own eyes, than begin by burying your nose in a guide-book. You can vary the old saying as you please " Read, mark, and digest " or " Mark, read, and digest." I prefer the latter. If people have no eyes, of what use is a guide-book ?

I can remember taking a father and son up to Newlands Corner, only to realise that they saw nothing and were inexpressibly bored. I was also to discover that neither father nor son knew the names of any trees, nor could they distinguish one tree from another.

This book is not for the blind, or the pedant — and who can be more blind than a pedant ?

Forgive me from digressing — but cancelling cuckoos.

I find that in my ignorance, I have always associated the vocalist with the layer of eggs. Does the lady cuckoo hold forth all over the place and deposit her eggs in other birds nests or does the gentleman do all the cuckooing ? Which goes to show how indolent one may be in the matter of asking questions.

We have an indefatigable bird with us this year. He or she begins before dawn or continues after dusk has fallen. This morning I heard a cuckoo cuckooing and an owl hooting in chorus. I wondered whether the owl was

feeling irritable and its hoot signified — “Hush up, you bloody fool.”

But, I have had a piece of luck. A cuckoo arrived in a Douglas fir, just over my head, and cuckooed vigorously. I stood quite still. Never had I had such a close-up of the bird and what interested me was its stage-manner. The creature was operatic. Its body swayed to and fro and there were flits of the tail and its joy in cuckooing made one think of a exultant and excited Italian or Spanish signer impressing her public.

Then a very small and angry bird arrived and began chasing the cuckoo here, there, and everywhere. I could not make out the breed of the attacker, but it was no bigger than a chaffinch or a sparrow. It was like a mouse haranguing a cat. And what was the small bird saying? — “Don’t you try any of your egg-tricks in my nest, you lousy parasite.” Or like the owl, was it bored with too much cuckooing, and echoing the owl? Or had it mistaken the cuckoo for a hawk?

II

THE river Mole is most devious and dilatory stream, always turning up where you don’t expect it. We met it for the first time on this particular pilgrimage at the bottom of the hill west of Cobham, where there is a bridge over the river, and a private bridge across the main road. On the right are the gates of “Pains Hill”, an extreme example of 18th century classicism in the way of garden architecture. Now, who was Pain, and was there a Pain or did the steep ascent from the river cause the weary to christen the place so. Let those who are interested solve the riddle.

I like the methods of the river Mole. Maybe those who have dawdled this far in this book may have realised that it is in sympathy with the Mole’s whimsies. Let us go where we please and as the mood moves us. You may map a county and card-index it, but that does not mean you have seen it or

caught the secret flavours of its soul. Guide books can be dreary affairs.

A Charles Hamilton was responsible for the temples of Pain Hill. So thorough was he that the scheme included a hermitage, and a hermit, but it would appear that the hermit was not a success. Possibly he did not drink of the water of the Mole, but crossed it — attracted by the local pub.

We passed through Cobham, and met the Mole again at that most attractive curve by the old mill. I believe that people in a hurry curse the mill. The stately and serene old homes gazing across the river at the water-meadows must be amused by the petulance of the petrol world.

“Why in such a hurry, little fellow? Stop, look and win some wisdom from the Mole.”

There is an interesting feature about the Wey and the Mole which had been pointed out to me on the map by Dr. Eric Gardener. At one point the rivers approach very close and diverging again towards the Thames, enclose an V shaped piece of county.

Dr. Gardener believes that in primitive times this area of land, protected by such natural moats, was thickly populated and packed with prehistoric villagers.

III

ON the left of the road leading to Cobham station and Stoke D' Abernon there has been much development. Almost, it might be regarded as an exhibition of modern domestic architecture. You can take your choice, but do not press upon me the brown or streaky bacon style, or cream cheese that has gone green at the top.

At Stoke D' Abernon — lovely name — we meet the Mole once more. It passes close to the church and bounds one side of the Stoke D'Abernon's homes and gardens, one time the home of Sir Edgar Vincent, later Lord

D'Abernon, that shrewd and potent ambassador to the Boche. I think it would have interested him to have seen the end of the coterie of blackguards and perhaps he is chuckling beside St. Peter and waiting for "Gubbler" to try and lie his way in.

The old church and Manor House have an aloof charm of their own. The church houses an unique exhibit, as most of the history books will tell you, the earliest Brass in Britain, that of Sire Johan D' Aubernoun, the date 1277. His son is buried beside him, date 1327. Sire Johan is in chain mail. Stoke D' Abernon is greatly Vincent. Look at the tombs, especially so at that of the Lady lying most comfortably on her side. Date 1603. There is another name connected with Stoke D' Abernon, that of a Surrey family, the Slyfields. A good name — this ! It would have pleased Dickens.

It is possible that Stoke D'Abernon was a Roman site, or near to one, for in the south wall of the chancel is a slice of Roman herringbone brickwork. It may have been scrounged from some Romano-British mansion. Personally, I always have a feeling that Rome was here on the bank of the placid Mole. One of the delights of these calm and sequestered spots is that you meet no common children. There is little here to attract the little savages, nothing to trample or steal. I am afraid I am not a lover of children in the mass. How many people, if they were utterly honest, would confess to the same prejudice.

On this very warm Spring day, it was a very green world here and we sat on the little oak seat in the shade just within the lych gate. The Manor House garden was forbidden ground, sacred to M.H.S. which translated to the Ministry of Home Security. Anyhow, we had seen women and small children in occupation of the garden, so the Ministry had not been idle, and it had found a fairly secure spot. One could look at the old red house beside the Mole. There are two fine plane trees in the garden which slopes so gently to the water.

IV

SO, on to Leatherhead, taking the left hand turning opposite the park. I mention this particular road, because it is associated with a fantastic war memory, and by two ladies in an Austin 8 who came round an impassable corner well in the middle of the road and I had to scrape the bank. As for the war of September 1940 memory, Stella had been staying in Sussex, and at a tea party I met a most gloomy General fresh from official London. I asked him whether I ought to bring Stella back, and he said — “I should do it tomorrow. The Germans may be over any hour.” So, I set out and often I smile now what I took with me, a First Aid Dressing case, and a loaded automatic pistol! Well, I came to another road junction and saw the Leatherhead road banned — “Unexploded Bomb.” I had to turn about and return to Stoke D’Abernon and take the alternative road.

I remember driving over Ashdown Forest. It had a desolate and sinister atmosphere. Lonely soldiers were crouching behind grass bunkers, watching the sky and I saw one or two pathetic little armoured cars which looked as though they have been evolved in some country garage.

Our choice of this road was to have a happy result. I stopped and got out to look at the Mole where it flows under the Newark bridge. A most placid English scene — this, so very green, and smelling sweetly of white thorn and cow-dung. Yes, even cow dung can have a pleasant flavour.

We drove on, but only a little way, for suddenly we came upon a long brick wall, leaning roadwards and propped up by many buttresses, and ending in a semicircular red ramp. I pulled up. This looked interesting. And, by Jove, it was!

Which goes to show that the surprises and personal discoveries of such pilgrimages are the most delightful. I saw a funny red gate and a ratty

lane and standing on the right of the lane, one of the most exquisite old brick buildings I have ever set eyes on. It was crumbling with age, beautifully blurred and softened and like some fine etching. I thought — “ Good Lord, this must be Slyfield House.”

I don't think I can describe the old place, for it is beyond mere words. It has to soak into the eyes of those who can feel the beauty. But there are some details which impress one, the carved ends of the old rafters, the little paunch of flint, the great string-course, the brick drip-mouldings over the windows. It is the proportion and colour tone which are so perfect. There is a second house beyond it, not so impressive, but very charming. The first building appears to be used as a lodging for farm workers and for storage. I imagine that the original house may have been a link-up of both buildings.

I went for Stella. I saw a face at an upper window of the older building on the farmyard side. I made signs and the window was opened by a pleasant county woman. I asked if this was Slyfield. It was or had been. And could we explore the garden ? The good woman looked a little dubious. The owners were away. But we decided to trespass, and no doubt we shall be forgiven. The poor garden was very war weary. We found a blue iron gate in a wall, and looking through, saw two old cedars and rough grass all somewhat appealing in its wildness. There was one feature near the winding drive which touched me. The lawn here had been a croquet lawn and the hoops were still standing in grass that was a foot high. I thought it rather pathetic.

Yes, Slyfield must have been more than Slyfield in its past. These old Surrey gentry must have loved beauty as beauty and not as mere property. And how these country craftsman must have laboured lovingly with timber, tile, mortar, brick and trowels. A part of the roofing is of stone — I suppose from Horsham.

Would that we had more of that craftsmanship.

V

LEATHERHEAD. Who was it who had a head of leather ? Or what is the derivation ?

At the crossroads in the centre of the town I had — seven years ago — two differences of opinion with the police. It was before the days of traffic lights. On the first occasion I was completely in the wrong, and driving a new American salon whose gear-lever had a knack of sticking in top gear and refusing to move into second. I was absorbed in a struggle with the thing and so missed the traffic policeman's signal. He was a nice lad, and he pulled me up. I apologized. I said I had a new car which was not friendly, and he smiled at me.

“ So I see, sir, but you won't have a new car long if you cross against the signal.”

On the other occasion, I had justification. The policeman on duty was having a chin-way close to the near curb, and I had to pass on his right. He was not a nice fellow. Most them are good fellows. He signalled at me; he had a swarthy and bad tempered face. I went for him. I said, “ If you would attend to your job and not stand gossiping in the wrong place, things would be all right ! ” He was dumb and I heard no more about it.

Leatherhead is a pleasant enough old town, but it is crowded, not country. I like the South Street and the stance of the church and the way the hill dips away steeply between high walls. E.V. Lucas came to the conclusion that Leatherhead was “ Highbury ” in Jane Austin's “ Emma ”. I should like to have seen it, and all Surrey in Jane's day. I suppose the chalky green mill-pool was more easily approachable and you could watch the coaches pulling up at or leaving “ The Swan.”

VI

MICHLEHAM. Now — one is in the deeps of cultured and very literary country, that of Fanny Burney, and later after marriage as Madame d'Arblay. I have tried to read the lady's letters and "Camilla" but without success. The one incident that piqued me in the lives of these distinguished people was General d'Arblay's enthusiasm as a gardener. He cannot have had much technical knowledge, for one day he indulged in a furious bout of weeding and challenged the tact of his gardener.

"A wonderful job, sir, but you've weeded up the asparagus bed!"

And what a lovely name is Camilla Lacey.

On the way to Michleham we were confined to the old road, which pleased me. The new concrete by-pass over a mess of tanks, lorries and armoured cars. Evil looking black beasts — these latter like rows of sinister beetles wanting to devour the green country.

We turned into Michleham and I pulled up to look at the delightful Jacobean home on the left and nearly at the bottom of the hill. A hut had grown in the front garden, and the house had been delivered to the ATS.

Shere, Compton and Michleham are — to me — the three Surrey Graces, charming creatures, and I can never make up my mind which one I would elope with.

We stopped again at the church. More ATS were in vigorous conversation by the pleasant old pub opposite. The tower of Michleham is flint, and very old, probably pre-Roman. Within, you will discover one of the finest Roman chancel arches you are likely to see — ever.

Then came that lovely hill dipping down in green coolness to the cedars of Juniper Hall and on the right was that deep verdant valley — half sunlight — half shadow. I have heard that it was proposed to take the new

road up this valley, but thank heaven it was spared. May it ever remain green and deep and mysterious.

Juniper Hall has memories of Madame de Stael and Talleyrand. It is supposed to have suffered much alteration, and its high brick chimneys compete with the cedars. It was full of huts and the Army.

I take off my hat to the plain man, but his voice is as hideous as his courage is good. Whatever progress and education may have done to him, they have not taught him to speak his own language or to rise in debate above a kind of garbled growl. If you feel a desire to escape from such voices, as we did, drive or walk for a mile along the road or lane to Headley. It runs in a great green secret trough between the high woods and meadows. Along it — on the left — you will come to a hanging beechwood spread with brown leaves that can seem purple in certain lights. It is a cascade of brown under high green gloom. A little further on, opposite a farm, is a prodigious chalk quarry with towering cliffs.

Somewhere opposite Juniper Hall lay Fredley Farm, the home of one Richard Sharp — hat-maker, poet, and M.P. — a curious mixture. He was a great entertainer of the brainy world, and among those who visited here were, Wordsworth, Scott, Crabbe, Babbage and Moore, a veritable cerebral centre.

So on down the hill to the turning on the left which climbs to Box Hill. I pulled up again here. The brow of the great hill was benign, smooth and meditative in the evening sunlight. We strolled up to Meredith's cottage and leaned upon the white gate. The little flint and brick house, with its white window frames and slate roof, and its steps going up to the white door, has an austere simplicity. It does not suggest the colourful complexity of the Meredith's mind, but it does assure you of the great novelist's wisdom. What a place to think in and to write in and recuse from little second-rate literary cheques ! There is a steep green behind

it of meadow and wood and its forward eyes look out upon the serene slope of Box Hills. Meredith was a great walker and knew his Surrey as few men knew it, and to this simple little house, the world came to pay him homage.

Strolling back down the steep lane I was intrigued by the varied texture of the garden hedge. I gave Stella three guesses as to its components. She brushed a hand along it, and got three of the answers right, The hedge was made up of field maple, yew, box rising, lilac and I think — privet, and a path or two of holly. I suppose it was the same in Meredith's day, and was loved by the gardener as he loved his master.

VII

BURFORD BRIDGE. Here it was that the old Roman road to London crossed the Mole, and went an over the downs to Ashtead. Burford has always had its Inns, and I can picture a Roman resting-place here, complete with baths and a bathing-pool, as now. A town like Silchester had its Country Club where you could park your chariot, bathe, play games, read, rest, and be fed, and Roman Burford may have had its country-club.

The white inn at the foot of the downs is famous, both as an inn and for some of its associations. Nelson slept here on his way to Trafalgar, and Keats wrote part of "Endymion", perhaps amid the woods and the hills.

I admit to having been prejudiced with regard to Burford Bridge. It had seemed in the old days to be the resort of a week-end crowd that was not lovely, but on this spring evening it gave us nothing but country and a pleasant atmosphere. I left Stella in the car, and went in to discover whether they could give us dinner. They could. I was met by Mr. Bartlett who has managed the hotel for twenty five years, and a man of smiles and eyes that miss nothing.

We wandered out into the garden, and sat there while on a grassy slope, with trees towering about us, and the bathing-pool with its blue flower

boxes and brown and green tiled roof lying below. The garden was in fine order, and I saw an old gardener still at work. Mr. Bartlett told us that the old hero was over seventy and had kept the place going. So, let some of the young things realise that the old folk are not finished.

We had an excellent dinner and two glasses of old Madeira. Afterwards, in the lounge, a nice waiter brought coffee. She was sorry, but it had to be black. Yet, a little later she arrived with a milk jug. The cow had come home.

Mr. Bartlett came and talked to us. He told us that three of the famous Swallow Holes in the Mole valley had lain in the track of the new road. The constructor had had to sink large steel cone-shaped caissons over them to form a foundation. Mr. Bartlett asked us if we had seen the Abbinger Manor Tithe Barn which had been taken down and re-erected as a dance-room. We had not, so he took us on a personal visit to this lovely old timber building. The great oak posts are new, but all the rest of it is original. You can still judge where the corn was stacked, and thrown down onto the central thrashing-floor for flailing.

It is an admirable adaptation, both in its lighting and in the various frescoes on the walls. Taste here, and cunning, and imagination. The thrashing-floor now serves dancing feet. I asked Mr. Bartlett whether the orchestra was housed in the gallery, but he told us that they perform below, otherwise the music seems to lose itself in the high, timbered roof.

I will confess that we did not climb Box Hill on this very warm evening. I — for one — felt digestive. Moreover, we knew the hill so well and always associated it with a pattern of prone or sitting humans. Its great green brow is best seen when solitude possesses it, and I know no piece of turf that had such polish or such colour variations — especially so in a drouhty year. The woods above are silvering with white beans, especially so when the leaves are young.

Those who know box only in the form of a garden edging must be surprised by the size of the wild tree. They tell me the box trees used to be cut for sale. I always associate the smell of box with the green stillness of the Silent Pool.

The view is splendid. Across the valley you can see the hill upon which Denbier stands. The original house was built and owned by the gentleman who founded Vauxhall Gardens.

The War Office once built a fort up here. Spiked railings are supposed to mark the site. I have never been sufficiently interested to look up the damned thing, nor did I want to go in search of any of the present war's manifestations.

On the homeward road "Moses" showed a riotous spirit. Perhaps he had felt bored with all the stopping and messing about, so I let him have his head and we stormed hills, and careened down valleys. The road was ours, and perhaps "Moses" said — "I'll show you I have some guts left!"

He had. I enjoyed that drive on what might have been a private highway. Once can enjoy speed on a serene spring evening, with every hill offering you a challenge. Soon, others might be enjoying it. Good luck to them, and no punctures!

CHAPTER 9

Soils And Sorrows And The Home Heath

IT used to be said of Sussex that God, when he had created the earth, discovered that He had odd samples of soil left over, and so He made Sussex. Surrey can give you as many variations — London Clay, the Bagshot Sands, the Greensand, the Chalk, the Gault, and a strip of Wealden Clay. Anyone who knows the county well can feel the soil by what he sees about him. There is a subtle change when you reach the chalk. I have come to know it without so much as seeing a flint or a white rear. The beech, the yew, the thorn, the wild, the wayfaring tree, and many plants, and the very turf reveal the soil to you. Climb these deep green lanes about Abinger, and you see the sand, walk of it, not Bagshott, and less unkind to the gardener. Yet, the Surrey Heaths have a beauty of their own, Bagshott, Cobham, Ockham, Wisley, Hindhead, to name only a few. Heaths and pine, heather and pine, and bog loving plants. There is nothing lovelier than the blaze of dappled willows massed under the pines. The first time I saw this sight was in Berkshire, and I stood and stared and wondered.

Surrey is the county of the rhododendrons and azaleas. Rhododendron grows wild in the woods. We had some lovely mounds of it in a wood of our own, but the Army came and peace and beauty and rhododendrons vanished. Bulldozers saw to that, and never again do I want to meet one of these vile machines. All the little secret paths disappeared and in the place came roads, with the bombed Putney Dance Hall as a part of the foundation. That was an exquisite touch ! Larches crashed. Concrete and white brick grinned at you in the greenness that was left.

Well, let us turn to happier things. If you wish to see rhododendrons in excelsus, visit the Waterers nursery at Bagshot. Waterers is an old Surrey name, and worthy of the beauty it produces. As for Bagshot Heath,

favourite haunt of highwayman in the old days, you may find nothing more terrifying than an adder. On one Surrey golf game my caddy slew an adder than was asleep in the sun at the foot of a pine, using a mashie for the job.

There are certain hyper-exquisite people who damn the rhododendrons as sentimental slush. Too much colour, too lavish a display. They call it stockbroker bathos. I am afraid I am one of those simple souls who take a childish delight in the gorgeous extravagance of the rhododendrons. Stella has always preferred azaleas. They are more delicate, more suggestive of other worldliness, more Botticelli than Reubens, and their perfume is unique. It has a queer pungent tang.

Here we are very much Bagshot sand. My previous garden was Sussex clay, about as complete a contrast as could be imagined, and I made all kinds of mistakes in my first contact with sand. Since then I have grown wiser. Loam, dung, water and all generously so — that is the secret.

II

I SUPPOSE I ought to say something about Weybridge. Several of its most interesting old houses have been pulled down to make room for modernity. All that is left of Oatlands Palace is a part of an old garden wall, incorporated into the Council Cottage Estate. James the 1st Silk House was standing when we first came here, but that has passed away. One old mulberry tree still survived, in spite of marauding children. A bomb smashed two cottages just opposite it, but the tree persists. Pastaurers Park is recorded by two gate pillars. Oatlands Park has been a hotel for nearly a hundred years. The York monument stands on Monument Green, opposite the charming old Ship's Inn where the London coaches used to deposit their passengers.

Dr. Eric Gardener lives in the " Catherine Sedley " house, just opposite

the church. She was a very witty lady with an irreverent tongue.

Weybridge's Church is newish, but its tall grey spire is beautifully placed. There are some interesting vaults and head-stones in the church yard. There lies John Eastland who built the Fanny Kimble house. Charles Kimble, with his French wife and family, used it as a country retreat in the middle 1820s. Mr. Kimble used to fish in the Wey. Fanny had smallpox in the house. A large mound of sand which was in the garden and Mr. Eastland refused to move, was shaped into the form of open-air theatre and planted with trees.

A fellow named Warwick Deeping has lived at Eastlands for the last twenty six years. The village will have it that Eastlands has always housed odd people. There are finials on the gate pillar and these ornaments have caused the vulgar to christen the house as The Loony Hatch. Passing ladies make rude remarks about rich authors who are eccentric.

So, you may assume that Weybridge has no very high opinion of authors, and has at times expressed that opinion by throwing old bedding and such rubbish over the literary wall.

Yet, we have an affection for Weybridge and its Heath, and the Wey and its meadows, and the Thames at Shepperton lock and the island. For a place only eighteen miles from town it still retains fragments of pure country. Warwick Deeping allowed us to explore part of the woodland, and the old orchard fronting on the Heath, which report has it once belonged to "Eastlands" and now belongs to it again. The old apple trees must be a hundred years old, and there is a lovely wildness about the corner that still defies the universal devastation. But I noticed that this wretched author had fitted uni-netting and barbed wire along the top of the old red brick wall. It will make him very unpopular with the local urchins.

I pointed this out to him and he said — "Oh — well, I prefer to give rather than be thieved from."

Disgusting old reactionary !

There is a pleasant farm at the end of Brookland's Lane and the home is supposed to have been a Henry 8th hunting-box. Cannas and pagi spread a good aroma here. Just before you reach the farm you are greeted by a grove of most splendid Scotch Firs. How on earth did the Ministry of Supply manage to leave them standing ?

Of Brookland's Track, I need not speak. All the world knows it — as it was, and many know it as it will be.

St. George's Hill, mount of many mansions, is crowned by " Caesar's Camp ". Its Golf Course is the most scenic of courses and beautiful as such, though part of it has become involved in the mess that is Vickers. St. George's Hill was a very wild and lovely spot before development came to it. And there is one minor historical incident that is not without significance for us. Certain fellows in Cromwell's day, who would have been known as " Bolshies " before Russia rescued us, seized a portion of the hill and proceeded to cultivate it and make it their own, but it would appear that the local peasantry objected and chased these 17th century communists away. Will history repeat itself ?

I am only quoting Dr. Eric Gardener, but since we were at the same school, he may forgive me. Weybridge Heath is scarred in places with banks and ditches, and I had often wondered about them. Dr. Gardener explained their origin. He had traced these signs of human activity as far as Cobham and Ockham, and found that they were the relics of the surface mining of iron ore. Several of the corn mills in the neighbourhood, including Ockham, became for a time iron-mills. Eric Gardener discovered one very old man whose father or grandfather had worked at one of the mills. Was it Cobham ? And local history tells of a giant who could use the great shears for cutting the metal. Normally, two men were required for the job.

This piece of history explains the roadway and the shallow excavations

I stumbled on near Ockham Mill. Iron ore was dug here, and smelted and milled on the spot.

Warwick Deeping told me that for a long time he has tried to locate the disused well at Eastlands. A drawing-out friend who indulged in automatic writing, got a message from an old man lay dead which indicated the position of the well. Later, he found another old man still living, who, as a boy had pumped the Eastland's water. The well lay where his psychic friend had placed it.

The Wey, the Bourne and the Basingstoke Canal join each other just over the old Weybridge bridge. It is a pleasant spot with its weeping willows and its waterings, and the high timber bridge of the Bridge House leaping the Wey. If you look across the meadows you will see a water tank on legs and I often think that the structure must have suggested to H. G. Wells the appearance of the Martians.

The Bridge House, grey and aloof amid its trees and behind a high wall and an immense blue conifer, had at one time a notable garden, and a notable mistress. It was full of beauty, but during the war it has shared the fate of so many pleasant places, and gone on war service. Warwick Deeping tells me that the Bridge House first gave him the urge to create the Eastlands' garden, which was in a sorry state after the last war. Belgian refugees had occupied the house. When the contents of Bridge House and its garden were sold, he bought some of the garden ornaments, including a seat in Chinese Chippendale just two hundred years old, which had been made for the Master Builder of Hampton Court. It is very fragile, but it still accepts sitters, against the white south wall of Eastlands.

If you want to meet a man of muscle, call in at "Eastwoods" by the bridge and introduce yourself to Mr. Ellis. He can still play with a bag of cement, but in his prime he was supposed to be capable of carrying four bags, one under each arm and one on each shoulder. Mr. Ellis must have

been the wrong sort of man to quarrel with. He could have flicked you into the Wey like one of the new threepenny bits.

CHAPTER 10

The Hog's Back - Some Valley Villages and A Heroine

HAD a benign giant proposed to throw up a huge brush from which the English scene should be all landscape - the Hog's Back might have been the result of his labours. The views are more open towards the Farnham end, but if you stop and get out and find a window amid the trees or an opening into a field, you will see more than you can swallow. Stella and I did this and set on a bench under the beeches at the top of a wheat field, and looked or rather — I looked — and chattered.

Surrey was almost in summer green on this early year, and the distances were faintly blurred. It is extraordinary how towns and villages vanish amid trees. Squint and try to identify familiar landmarks and you will discover a puzzle. Often I have set below Newlands Corner and looked Thameswards with glasses and tried to identify the outlines of various hill features and been baffled. There are certain landmarks that cannot be concealed, such as Hindhead and its radiolocation station and the tower of Charterhouse, and I think - Leith Hill, and on the north side, the Woking gasworks chimney. Not a romantic object. You may spend hours at this game, and lose yourself in the dim uplands of Hampshire.

We trundled on and down the steep hill to Puttenham. How restful are the valley villages. The old folks know where to build for shelter and water. Nor do I know any country where the churches pose themselves so adequately as the Surrey Churches, though pose is not the right word. They and the farmsteads have Hollywood licked to a frazzle. Puttenham Church is perfectly sited on a green cushion in the shelter of trees. Its old tower with its flint, brick and tile is perfection. These churches record so many human incidents and activities. At the bottom of the tower stairway was a chalked notice — "Danger, bells up." So might England

have said to the Hun — “ Danger, tails are up ! ”

And the last pew towards the tower staircase is marked for the bell-ringers.

There is some good Roman work here. And notice a tablet on the wall which records the death of a lad named Pope, who was lost climbing in the Pyrenees, and how a rescue party and his mother went out, searched and found his body and buried him in the churchyard.

Puttenham is a very pleasant village, but the church is its gem and climbing back to the great ridge, we crowned it and slid down towards Wanborough. We had never spent any time in Wanborough, and a certain chillness seemed to descend upon the county after the spacious vistas up above. Now little bungalows etc, were spotted about, and the dominate feature was the high tower of a farm silo. I said to Stella “ This is a funny place. I think I’ll turn back,” and her answer was “ There may be something.”

So, I persisted. I would persevere for half a mile, and if ever perseverance was rewarded -- mine was. We passed under a railway bridge and were meandering along a straight stretch of road, when suddenly, an old grey house slid into view on our left. Eureka ! There were two monumental trees in front of the house which bade us stop. One was a splendid cedar, the other puzzled me, and I could not name it, but it was to be named for me. It was that rare creature, a deciduous cypress.

A little “ Ha-Ha ” separated the garden from the road. The old long grey house had high brick chimneys and a white balcony peeping round a corner. On the right, one could see old out-buildings, with a cupola and weather vane. The place had such mystery and repose that I was tempted to trespass and discover if we could trespass further. So, going in by the stable drive, I saw a man at a cottage doorway. He disappeared, but returned when I heeded. I liked the look of him, and his shrewd, country face.

Could we see the garden ? Was anybody in residence ?

He twinkled at me.

“ The lady is in the kitchen. She lives in the kitchen. In these days -- everybody ---- ”

Did I not know that. I showed him my hands.

“ Gardener’s hands.”

So, I knocked at the kitchen door, and the mistress of the fine house appeared. I proffered a card, and my plea that we might see the garden.

The garden ? Well, there was no garden in the before -- the -- war -- sense. But we could look if we wanted to, and she would go with us, so I went for Stella and the car.

So began an hour’s most happy and revealing intimacy, for Stella and the Lady of the House fell for each other. Voices and a sensitive sympathy can be so significant.

We passed through a door in a wall and saw -- well -- so much, that once again, words seem futile.

The house -- “ Westwood ” had been here some four hundred years, yet never lost its harmony. The balance of the grey façade and its great white sash windows seemed to me perfect, with its white balcony and steps and the soaring chimneys. In the angle by the wall, some Georgian had built a little white glasshouse in the simple, classic style, and so utterly different from the modern product. I noticed that the shutter was closed over the larger window, and that some of the glass was broken and that one red chimney needed help.

Yes, a Doodle-Boy had done that. And a bomb in the field across the road had pushed over a part of the garden wall. What, in this isolated place ? And then I remembered that Aldershot was not very far away. I noticed that the grass had been cut. Yes, My Lady had cut it herself. She showed us a delightful old pool full of water lilies, with a yew hedged formal garden

beyond it, and while we wandered we talked.

It was an amazing confession that we drew from her. She had garrisoned and defended this gallant old home against Fate, alone and with a few hours help from her gardener's wife. She had had no less than fifty persons billeted on her at one time or another and she still had billetiers. She lived in the kitchen, did all the cooking, cared for all her treasures, made beds, cleaned homes, cut grass, etc. Her son was serving, and so were her two daughters. She told us all this with complete naturalness and without the ghost of a grouse and my homage went out to her.

Gallant home, gallant lady.

She asked us if we should like to see the house inside. But were we not taking up too much of her time? No, she had high-tea to prepare for her people, but that could wait a while, so we followed her in by the porch door, Stella holding my arm.

Now, there are houses which have an instant and most strange effect upon one. They seem so packed with memories and personalities, that even in the silence, invisible tongues speak. We passed into the great cool hall with its black and white chessboard floor and its old furniture, and into an atmosphere of stillness and of peace. There was the same sweet, sad solemnity here that one divines in some dim old church. I felt Stella's fingers tightened on my arm, and I knew that she was feeling things that her eyes could not see.

Mahogany, oak, old pictures, china, glass, and the soft temper and dignity of this quite room. About I could hear the rattle of hoops and crinolines, and see gentlemen in high collared coats sitting round the table. We passed on and up some stairs to the drawing room. There were family portraits everywhere. The white shutters were closed over the great windows, but we could see a vast blue carpet turned back and the furniture grouped on one side.

"Yes," said My Lady, "Moth in the carpet. I am doing my best, but it is so heavy and one has to move all the furniture about."

More courage in her fight to preserve this English home. Next, she took us downstairs again into a most delightful little room, the kind of room a woman loves and in which she keeps her treasures. It was intimate and colourful and full to the brim with beauty. Miniatures, china, portraits, little pictures in silk, photographs, books, etc. It was timeless, this little section, yet crowded with memories, fragments of the past and people who were dead. But in such a home nothing seemed dead, for as one grows older the dead may seem more alive than the living. And I saw on Stella's face a kind of radiance. She could feel this other woman's room, and divine the things that lived on in it.

We took leave of our new friend. We said that we would come and see her again when help had come to her and the house. She smiled upon us. Her kitchen waited for her, and yet I think our visit had helped her, and made her feel that these were other people in the world to whom such a house might be as good and as sacred as it was to her.

A great spirit -- hers, and I salute it.

II

WE climbed again to the Hog's Back. At one place, as many motorists may remember, there used to be a broad, sweet stretch of turf to the south of the road. Cars could be parked here and the picnic basket brought out. This stretch of turf has become a mass of chalky mud. Could not the Army have found some other and less precious spot to spoil? Also, I wandered about the truncated pillars flanking the road. Were they to prevent planes landing? Well, anyway, I hope they will pass with the war.

We had a good view of Crooksbury Hill, and Seale lying in the valley

below. Crooksbury looks somewhat ragged as to the pines, as though war-birds had been pecking at them, but I imagine it is a sign of senility among the trees. It will be sad when the tall pines pass away, to be replaced by youngsters. A landmark will be lost for many years.

III

WE dropped down to Seale. Now, if Hollywood needed a scenic village it might transport Seale in-toto and return it unblemished. I do not mean this unkindly to Seale, but its miniature compactness and atmosphere suggest the stage. The church, like nearly all Surrey churches, is beautifully placed, and guarded by its round topped stone wall. From the churchyard, the glimpse down the little green valley is exquisite. The church itself is a mingling of the new and the old, with the new dominant.

Follow the wooded lane to the east, and you will come up on two or three charming old places. Eastend Farm in particular -- tile, timber, brick, and stone. Lying as it does at the bottom of the steep bank, it spreads itself delightfully behind its hedges. It may wear the label "Private" by its little group of old elms, but I -- for one -- would wish all such places the peace of privacy.

CHAPTER 1

Albury Heath, Farly Heath and Hurt Wood

I AM a great believer in contrasts. I think that half the social and economic trouble of the world are due either to the provocation of contrasts, or the lack of them. Having passed through this most boring war, and found myself doing duty as a gardener, boot-boy, butler, furnace-stoker, log-splitter, and shop-boy carrier, I have come to realize that good as simple activities may be, a plethora of them my produce an acute form of weary. The adventure had gone out of life, save that of procuring an egg or an orange.

It has made me more sympathetic to the working world. They live in the same little area, day after day, and there is no escape from it. Hence, boredom, resentment, and social upheavals.

A very understanding business-man once said to me — “I know the coal-men pretty well and one of them confessed to me — ‘We live in a pit, in more senses than one. There is no escape, no adventure.’”

My friends remedy was a singular one.

“I would run state lotteries. What the plain man would like would be a gamble, a chance. He might know that would be small likelihood chance of drawing one of the big prizes, but the chance would be there.”

Yes, contrast, and adventure.

II

SO, after Chertey Meads and the rich and towering woodland of St. Annes Hill, we sought something milder, heath and pines and the memories of far away historic things.

Take the Albury road, but do not turn right to Albury. Pass the Albury

Park gate and climb the steep hill. You will arrive on a piece of common land — Albury Heath and a pleasant spot for a picnic. Go on, downhill around the level crossing, and you will reach Brooks.

There is a most fascinating Junk Shop here, and it is worth a visit. The last time we bought anything there we were saved by the proprietor, who — though in his nineties — had a shrew sense of values ! But we are passing on the Farley Green, a very English corner, and we turn right and climb over the wild heath land to — Rome.

All roads led to Rome, and here was one along which the Agrarians and merchants may have passed and beside it stood a little Roman shrine or temple. It is easy to discover now, for the powers that be have marked out the site in local stone.

Ten years ago it was not so easy to find the Roman site on Farley Heath. I stodged about for hours before I stumbled on it. It lies just north of the modern road and a little plateau, and it was smothered up in bracken. A solitary thorn tree marked it out. You came upon a little grassy hollow, with crumbling foundations showing, and fragments of Roman red brick and tiles about.

There was a vallum round the temple area, a curiously enough the Roman road cut through it. It appears to have been a branch road linking Stane Street with the Guildford Gap, and perhaps joining the great south-west road at Stanes. Stane Street, as most of you know, ran from Chichester, and over the South Downs, and across Sussex and Surrey. Begmas, with its famous villa, lies close to it below the South Downs. The road made for the Dorking Gap and London. It crossed the Mole about Buford Bridge. There is still a stretch of it in Sussex along which the modern road runs.

Not far from Farley Heath temple, on the Hurtwood side, is the site of an old quarry from which I like to think the Romano-British builders quarried their stone.

I had a piece of luck one day at the temple site. I was foraging around, looking for possible finds, and I saw not far from the modern road, a place where a mole had been working under the turf, and lying on the side of a molehill was something that looked like a metal cap off a bottle. I picked it up and found that I had a Roman coin. When cleaned it proved to be of the period of Constantine. It is now — I think — in the Guildford Museum.

If you visit that museum you can read a short account of what life in Surrey may have been like in Roman days. I had written a romance on the same subject before I had seen the script in the museum and the picture I had painted was so like the antiquities that I felt provoked and not a little pleased.

Sit in the turf beside the plan of the foundations, and look like about you and dream. Don't imitate two gay things who passed as I was sitting there one day. They strode straight across the site, apparently quite blind to it and its possible significance, youth, as youth is apt to be — so blindly full of its own affairs.

Over yonder across the valley, you see the North Downs and the Great Way. If you have your glasses with you, you may be able to make out makings in the green hillside. The downs are seamed with trackings, and old banks and ditches. There is one big bank and ditch below and a little to the east of Newland's Corner, which had puzzled me. If one supposed it to be part of a defence scheme, it seemed too isolated and its upper and lower ends do not reach either the valley or the hilltop. I could see it quite clearly today, like a green arm pointing up the downs. Now, it is agreed by the experts that in primitive days many of the mounds and banks in the chalk county were left white and turfless and served as landmarks to travellers. I have often wondered whether the great green bank was a white arrow marking some tracking for those who came from the south, and had to

traverse the wilderness of the Weald. In those very early days life centred about the chalklands and the downs were natural roads. The valleys were mostly bog and forest.

But let us picture the Surrey of the Romano-British days. It was as much as it was in Tudor, Jacobean, Georgian and Victorian days, a county gentleman's paradise. Here he lived in his great house with his garden and orchard and home farms, and hunted and had oyster sent to him from Hampshire. He had his slaves, and his wine from Spain and Gaul and perhaps he grew vines and made wine of his own. He had his woodsmen and his shepherds, his horses and grooms, and huntsmen, his dogs, and primitive chariot-coaches for travel. When the spirit moved him he could go up to Londinium to visit his tailor and his wine merchant. It must have been a spacious and Arcadian life, until the barbarians began to storm in from the wild north and from over the sea, and the old world fled, and its houses crumbled or went up in flames.

I can see Roman mansions and villages foreshadowing such places in Shalford, Albury, Shere, and Dorking, also at Compton and Puttenham. In fact, just over the Hampshire border near Bentley, a noted archaeologist has made many finds, and is of the opinion that all the countryside was rich in Roman villas. But don't think of the house as a villa. In Britain they were built to meet the weather, in what is known as the Corridor Style. The typical county mansion had a summer room, and a winter room heated by a hypocaust, a bath, a chapel, bedroom, servant quarters, kitchen — etc. Often it had a courtyard in front of it, with a porters lodge, and a kind of covered way or veranda.

If you want to get lost or feel lost wander down the heath towards the valley. You may come upon a little houses planted in this wild place. You can reach Albury and from Albury climb up to Newlands Corner.

On one of my rambles down a sandy track, I found a nice little flint knife

lying on a bank and waiting to be collected. You may also stumble upon prodigious artifacts.

I have just had a talk with Eric Gardener. He is at work on the tracing out of this Roman road, and it is his opinion that it did not make for Stames, but crossed the Thames at Walton close to the Water Works. Dredging has produced very solid evidence of a massively paved ford here, in fact it put the dredges out of action for a time. And on the bank close by was discovered a hoard of horse-shoes, so there was a smithy by the ford.

CHAPTER 12

More of the Tillybourne and Albury

IT may surprise many people to know that the S.C.S. of Elizabeth's day, was represented by the Evelyns of Wotton, and that the vivacious little stream - the Tillybourne — provide the part of the motive-power for the powder-mills. We have seen the Tillybourne at Shere. It was with you again through Albury Park, and through Albury village to Chilworth. It is a swift and lovely little stream and it is said that its more peaceful product was to begin with — paper. The Evelyns had their first mill on the Hogsmill at Kingston, a very suitable place, judging by its name. Then they moved to Godstone and contracted to supply Queen Bess with a hundred larts of powder a year. I understand that a lart equalled a ton. In the Armada years, England was terribly short of powder, only thirty larts being in the Queen's stores. So, it would seem that in our unreadiness to meet invasion and all that, we were no more wise than in 1914 and 1939.

Later, the Chilworth mills were built, but the Monarchs of the day were bad payers. They either did not fork up, or they would suddenly transfer the contract to someone else. It may have been an ingenious method of procuring a double supply of the product and of paying neither of the producers.

In 1641 the Lay Parliament abolished the monopoly, but the Chilworth mills continued to make powder.

Authority has it that in 1880 they were producing cordite, and in 1900 still making it. The Chilworth Mills was among the many exactions cursed by Cobbett.

I cannot say that I am an admirer of the Albury House. I gather that it was built by a banker and it might well be so, though the care of bullion does not necessarily postulate bad taste. The gardens and the park are

otherwise. John Evelyn laid out the gardens and there is the famous yew hedge described by Cobbett. I think the most pleasant feature is the great turfed terrace with its old wall, and acanthus herbaceous border, with the wooded hill rising behind it, and in its centre the semicircular pool, and the gate leading to the great tunnel. This underground passage is the sandstone burrows right through the hill into the next valley. I explored it one hot summer day, and found it deliciously cool. Who made it, and what was its purpose ? Was it no more than a short-cut under the hill ?

In the Park stands old Albury Church, no longer in use, which seems a pity. It is so beautifully sited, and is so mellow, which cannot be said of the new church. I think I have read somewhere that two pillars in the old church may be Roman, and might have been scrounged from the site on Farley Heath.

Albury is — of course — Duke of Northumberland. It came to that family through Drummonds, the banker. It is one of those presentations that have caused me to exclaim " Thank God for a few Dukes ! " I am not quite sure, but I think it was the present duke who inspired the attempt to clean up and control Newlands Corner, and the Downs when they were in the process of falling into disrepair. It is a strange thing that Urbania — when it spends a day in the country, should think it its right to make an unholy mess of that same country, and to spread about as stuff into any poor bush its unpleasant leavings.

I once made a list of the exhibits. It included old newspaper, dirty cardboard picnic plates, orange peel, ice-cream cartons, cigarette ends and empty packets, bits of bread, the oily leakings from gear-boxes, and engine cases, string, corks, bottles — broken and otherwise. Now — why ? Just thoughtlessness or slovenly mindedness ? Thing's that had been brought from London and its suburbs could be taken back and deposited in the domestic dustbin. We county folk resent being treated as a dustbin.

So, the Surrey C.C. took control. Posts and notices were erected. Cars were not permitted to splurge over the sweet turf. There was a capacious car-park, and the charge was a modest sixpence. When staying at Newlands Corner, it used to be my delight on a Sunday to on and watch offending motorists fallen upon by the police. Education may need prosecution.

I remember after the previous war, when the Duke of Northumberland was attending to give evidence on the Coal Mine Inquiry. He was heckled by Mr. Robert Smillie, who kept repeating the caustic question — “What do you do?”

To which the Duke's reply was always the same.

“I manage my estate.”

Now, the Duke may have become something about the mining of coal, but I doubt whether Mr. Smillie had the slightest knowledge of the complicated behaviour of managing an estate. Taken seriously and conscientiously by the owner it is a whole time job, and not always a very lucrative one in county districts. Sympathy, consideration, patience, and generosity are some of the virtues required, also a personal knowledge of farm and farmers. The knowledge needed may extend from forestry to sanitation.

These two good citizens were on the opposite sides of a social ditch, but now the ditch is shallow and narrow, and in spite of the extremists, I think the mutual comprehension of all classes is more profound and sympathetic. We need the constructive voice, not the demagogue's snarl. England is going to be much more for the English, and though as may regret the destruction of much beauty, there will be compensations.

I also remember the words of an old gardener when the very spacious garden he had worked in all his life and loved, was cut up for small homes.

I once asked him “Aren't you sad?”

His reply was — “Well, what a lot of pleasure it is going to give to other people.”

Benign old man.

I have just heard that a huge old home and park in the neighbourhood are to be acquired by the County Council and converted into a public school for working-class boys. In the past, two old ladies lived here. Well, is not the transformation rational and good? Two or three hundred lads acquiring knowledge amid beautiful surrounding, instead of two old dears — who — probably — were robbed right and left by their staff!

II

ONE thing that has struck me about Surrey in this victory spring is the small amount of devastation that has been done in the matter of tree-felling, so far as the outlines and tincture of the landscape are concerned. It seems as richly treed and as green as ever, and in some places the elimination of too much conifer has brought light and lightness. I know that individual woods have suffered, both from the army and the timber-men, even as our poor wood suffered.

Unfortunately and somewhat strangely the timber-men of my experience are not lovely people and the idea that men who work among trees shall love them is a sentimental illusion. These fellows do not seem to care a damn what damage they do to other trees. They are completely callous, mere hewers of wood. In fact, that they are little less than slaughter-men.

Thinking it over, I realised that England is blessed by the individual scattering of her trees, and has been saved by it, so far as the sylvan texture is concerned. We are supposed to be poor in timber compared with countries who have state forests, and in Surrey there has been no felling in the mass sense. Trees in hedgerows, trees in gardens, trees in parks and fields, little woods and coppices, these have flouted the man-destroyer, and preserved the patina of the landscape. It was not worthwhile to bring

in gangs and tackle to slay solitary trees.

I would pray that this might prove prophetic in the social sense so far as our England is concerned. The more individual the people, the less likely are they to be mass-grown or mass-murdered. I know that everything is "Groupy" these days, and Stella and I have been reproached for not being groupy, but I have no wish to see this England as to its woodland, one vast state conceived plantation, any more than I wish to see it — socially — as a municipal garden or a chain-store. Ye Gods forbid!

The old man seems to have done much babbling, so now — back to reality.

III

WHIT SUNDAY, and heavy rain. Sad for the holiday folks, but good for gardeners and crops after a long dry spell. The sudden wetness made one fact more obvious, how the roads had suffered, for all the potholes and weak places were full of water and yet I think it is wonderful how the roads have stood up to wear and tear. "Moses" bumped and staggered and creaked and sent pebbles flying.

Passing the "Newlands Corner" gates, I had another look at the notice board. Centre for Soviet Nationals! Moscow had arrived and un-English figures of khaki were loafing about. A Russian Repatriation Centre — I suppose. Well, — well! I pulled up on the brow of the hill, and got out and met a bitter wind. The landscape was all grey mush, and the heavy greenness of summer and this — before the end of May. Poof, a few days ago, the temperature was 85 in the shade, and now one needed an overcoat.

We free-wheeled down the hill, passing a merry and solitary group of four young things, an English girl taking a snapshot of another girl, and two young men — Russians. Assumedly, sex has no limitations! Drenched and deserted roads, the Silent Pool very silent, wind in the trees

scattering wetness. So, onto Albury.

Now, why was I disappointed with Albury on this grey day? Was it the weather, or did not the village live up to my memories? Its deep valley was as green as ever, and the Tillybourne was still the Tillybourne. I would call Albury the village of High Chimneys. They begin with the towering red brick chimneys of Weston House, ornate and stately, with its central stack older than its neighbours. We stopped here, for the garden was a show, and just inside the gate a hydrangea in full flower scented the wet air. The rain had cleared, and we paid our shillings and wandered. A long, green vista with two features of interest, a fine tulip tree, and a chestnut wood which is made up of a one tree that spreads all over the ground like a vast candelabra.

I left Stella making friendly noises to a pen of goslings, and wandering to the end of the grassland, met old friends with whom I had never come into such close contact. When you view the landscape from Newlands Corner, you will see just west of Albury Park some steep arable fields that have always made me think of a medieval scene as pictured in some old book, a hill with playful fields, a wood, and church steeple. There was no church steeple here, but these fields which had looked so like fields in a woodcut, were now at my feet.

Yes, Albury was disappointing. The Mill and Millhouse looked bald and austere. More high chimneys. We did not visit Albury Church. I had seen it before and did not wish to see it again. Martin Tupper is buried here, and the florid church might be a suitable memorial to a florid and flowery fellow. He posed, and was accepted as a poet.

On towards Chilworth. There are, compensations before you meet the modern chill of Chilworth, the Evergreen Magnolias that send a shiver down your spine. Postford House and Tangley Mere. We turned into Postford House. The old ochre coloured, Regency flavoured home with its

slate roof and generous veranda is most attractive. So is the garden, with the Tillybourne flowing through it like a miniature canal. The queer point is that the streams seems at a higher level than the bottom of the valley.

Mr. Lindsay Smith is an expert gardener, and the garden is full of rare and lovely things. I left Stella mediating in a garden-house, and wandered. I found myself passing the rarities with their name-plates, and making for the common where the work was done, to the potting-shed, a glass-house and frames. Now — why ? Because I was peeved over not knowing the name of everything ? No — I don't think so. I find that I am more and more bored by nomenclature, and any suggestion of ostentation. Nature does not name anything. Thank God for her silence in this respect. Man and his catalogues and his museums ! I want to steep myself in a live world, and not crane my neck looking at labels.

Blessed a broad symphony of spreading fields, and rolling hills and woods, corn knee deep, orchards that are just orchards, and water that does not refer to itself as H₂O !

Far, the wiser a man becomes, the more he can say like some sage who has drunk of the milk of humility "I — know nothing." The "Know-All" is a dreadful person. Humility is not a popular virtue in a world that has been affected by a thing like Hitler, but without it there is no profundity, no truth. Moreover, there is a modern feeling about life among the deeply wise, that the whole cosmic scheme should be felt as life and living, yes, felt. There are moments when one can feel a wood, or a flowering field, as a hill sunning its brow in the sunset.

So, on to Chilworth and quickly through Chilworth. It is as though old mill workers still haunted and possessed this place, and that it remembered Cobbett's curses. I do not know where the powder-mill use to be, and I have no wish to know. But you come again to the green common-

land with St. Martha's up above, both hill and plain verdant and consoling.

IV

THEN there is Shalford, and the charm of Surrey is back again. I have an affection for the old house standing out on two white front legs and by the church there is a most delightful corner, old homes, white planters, and green doors that makes for peace.

I once took an American film-producer touring to look for locations, and when we came to this corner of Shalford he sat up and shouted.

"Stop — I'd say this was it."

It was, and it went into a picture and my respect for the American soared mightily.

John Bunyan is supposed to have lived in a cottage on Shalford Commons. If so, the Pilgrims Way may have prompted The Pilgrims Progress.

Shalford Fair is said to have covered 140 acres of the fields by the church. It had a court of its own, the Court of Piepowder, and emergency tribunal called by the merchants to deal with thefts, violence, etc. Perhaps offenders against the Fair's morals and methods were ducked in the River Wey.

I have never seen a Dunking Stool, but I have met ladies whom it would have pleased met to souse in the village pond.

When I mentioned this to Stella, she told me not to be so primitive. Scolds were scolds, and naggers must nag, but they were unhappy people who threw mud at their own souls.

Yes, yes, but what would their husbands have to say on the subject ?

V

SO, homewards through Guildford, up the steep old street, with the River Wey and boathouses below. Strange, the things one wants to do or does not do. I have always felt the urge to go afloat, from that particular place and drive down between the willows, dreaming of the Lady of Shallot. And I have never done it. There is time yet !

We passed the Castle gate and the old houses, but Guildford need payer of its own. We arrived in the main street with its grey cobblers and as I parked " Moses " at the steep hill I let out an involuntary " Gosh ! " The cobbles looked the same and were not. It was like driving over the wooden slats of a xylophone. Almost I expected " Moses " to shed his dentures.

CHAPTER 13

Effingham and the Horsleys

EFFINGHAM, and its railway station are not man and wife, as perhaps they have as many married couples might wish to live but the open grassland between them has a charm of its own, with the Downs rising like a back-curtain. I always think of this flat green common-land as a vast Goose-Green for, when the war was inevitable and visible to all save the dear old fool of a country, we went goose-hunting for the future good of the larder. We were going towards Effingham when I sighted a white company distinctly busy in front of one of the scattered houses.

“ Geese — darling ! ”

I pulled up and went upon the adventure only to be hailed as a goose, for my hypothetical geese were monstrous white ducks, Aylesbury I suppose, but of a largeness and fitness that was astonishing. One quacked at me exultantly.

“ Geese, you fool ! Go and teach your grandmother —— ! ”

So, I had returned to the car, and confessed to Stella that I had been received with quacking scorn and laughter.

Which memory causes me to ask a question. I happened to be in the midst of a book by a Highbrow gentleman, a very agile and witty fellow. But why is the Leftish wit so acid ? How is it that you never seem to get a hearty, human chuckle from Bloomsbury ? Frustration, resentment, envy, and hate. Surely these brainy people need not feel so confessor, and so windy, for hate and fear are the twin children of the inferior. My friend the duck has a shrewd and mighty eye, and his quacks are full of the exultation of being duck ! These other wretched souls appear to be so empty of the joy of living. They are stuffed with words, and not good green band-weed. They are not men of their hand or of their hearts. Where would England have

been in 1940 but for Bills, and Toms, and Harries? I unky. As Mr. Agate has put it, the Claudes and the Basils, and the Lavelles would have been under the bed as in America, lecturing the lowbrows.

Hate the Rich.

Where does Richness begin ?

Is the man with two hundred a year a filthy capitalist to the man with only a hundred ?

II

WELL, WELL, WELL ! One may be allowed to wonder what a Russian would make of our English villages. Like our Constitution, they have grown in their own particular way, clean and comely and individual with faces as different as the faces of humans. They still centre round the church and the village inn, and though the Great House may have fallen beneath war-service and taxation, the village goes on.

I have just heard of a lad back from the East, who fell into an ecstasy when he found himself in the village pub. Its homely and familiar smell was more fragrant than all the posies of the politicians.

Yes, why politics, oh — why politics ! All the demagogy and the clap-trap and the slogans are back again. The old and wiser Germans used to say to me before the war. “ Politics, poobitics ! In this place, sir, we are free from politics, but for the love of the good God, keep that to yourself.”

These villages decorating the skirts of the Down are all chalk and flint, with tile and red brick as supplements. You can tell them at once by the walls. Effingham has many delightful buildings, and a very refreshed church and in the churchyard lies what must be a vast family vault denuded of its railings. In such a village as this you can still feel the England of the Armanda, and Lord Howard of Effingham setting out with his

little ships.

The rather fearsome cross-roads now have traffic lights. I remember how one had to poke one's nose with extreme caution into the main road, for the walls blind everything. And what a noble road it is, leafy for so much of its way, a green aisle rising and falling between the tall beeches. There are other trees — of course — but the beech predominates, and the chalk is its kingdom. The country sweeping to the Downs and towards the Effingham-West Horsley road is sprouting new homes, and to my eyes they are good, some of them very good. They have individuality and imagination and are set in the most lovely surroundings, and when their gardens are mature the place will be a paradise for those who wish for peace and to live a little apart.

There is a point on the road worth exploring. When you come to a little white lodge — Effingham Lodge — on the right and on the brow of a hill, you will see a broad-way planted with beeches on your left. There is a dead tree opposite the lodge. Park here, and wander up a path beside somewhat senile chestnut fencing. The path divides, and the right hand path brings you to a wheat field which runs to a superb beech wood, and beyond it, the blue green distances of the woods about Netley. What an English scene, and how lovely and utterly untarnished ! The left-hand path goes on into the woodland.

You will notice where you have parked your car that the trunks of the beeches bear the scar of many letters. I don't think I have ever seen tree trunks so thick with the passion to perpetuate the presence of Tom, Dick, and Harry. A very innocent form of egoism, but I would rather youth refrained. One tree with a pair of initials and perhaps a heart may seem sylvan and romantic, but this multiplication of knife-scrawls makes the practice seem a little silly.

On towards East Horsley. Ascending to Eric Gardener, the Roman road

from Farley to Walton passed close to East Horsley and it can be traced in the woods by the disinclination of trees to grow on the site. I pulled up, got out, and looked over the flint wall where a part of it had crumbled away.

“Coo ! and Gosh ! ”

For, over yonder stood Horsley Towers, presumptuous and mock- French, and a prize Bounder in the way of mansions and like most members of the Bounder fraternity, quite unself-centred. I went back to Stella and told her of the monstrosity.

“Perhaps it’s a joke,” said she.

Well, a very solid joke without a sense of humour.

III

EAST HORSLEY is a little enigmatic until you accept it for what it is — Horsley Towers gone native. There is a certain decaying charm about the multiplicity of walls — flint, birch and terra-cotta, with little peep-holes inserted. They seem to rabble all over the place — these walls. There is a gazebo beside the road, smothered in ivy, and its ramp of steps half remain. A walled enclosure just below it suggests the site of a walled pool. The church and churchyard, like all these in Surrey, are attractive. They continue to bury here, and I was struck by the number of newish graves, and the wealth of flowers everywhere. East Horsley seemed to remember its poor dead. A new grave had just been opened in the chalk, and a notice said. “Keep off the Sides.”

I kept off them.

The most notable features in the church is the tomb of Thomas Cornwallis Esq. and his lady. He was Groom Porter to Queen Elizabeth, a handsome gentleman, and reminding one of the old saying — “Handsome is as

Handsome does." Thomas Cornwallis served his Queen, a most unmodern virtue, for it would seem that to our contemporaries, service is regarded as contemptible. But why? One can be blessed with happy and friendly and faithful service and value it. Maybe it depends upon whether one deserves it. There is a fine and colourful Coat of Arms on the wall above the tomb, but it would need an expert in Heraldry to read it. None the less it is pleasing and stately to the eye.

The pepper-potted gatehouse of the "Tower" is preferable to the home itself. It is now an estate office and new homes are there. Good business. Let English homes enjoy the heritage of obsolete ostentation.

You pass on and reach West Horsley church. Below it and to the right, the fine red brick façade of West Horsley Place confronts you in the meadows. I once visited the garden of this house on a drenching August day. The rain came down like millions of silver wires. When I took my garden ticket — the gardener in charge must have thought me a super-enthusiast or crackers — the explanation was that we had had a drought, and I was exalting in the deluge soaking over Bagshot sand.

West Horsley place has two unusual features, two brick dog-kennels in front of the house, and of the same age as a flint wall in the garden that is planned in a series of curves, in fact a wavy wall. I can picture mastiffs inhabiting those kennels, and suggestively forcibly to thieves, vagrants, and the Leftists of those days that the prowling of private property was inadvisable.

West Horsley church, standing beside and above the road, with a very old cottage to keep it company, is most attractive with its grey brown stucco walls, flint tower, and shingled cap. Stella went in with me, and my first impression was one of unusual space, as though I was entering a large and pillared hall. The outside of the church did not promise such spaciousness. I put Stella in a pew, while I wandered round. The church

contains the tomb of another English worthy, one — Nicholas — who was First Secretary of State to Charles 1st and Charles 2nd. If I remember rightly there are no less than three altars in this church. If I am wrong, let someone correct me.

The church yard is yet another lovely Surrey garden of the dead. How good to sleep one's last sleep in such a place ! I noticed that the grass had been thick with cowslips, another product of the chalk.

Opposite the church is a delightful right-of-way across the rich meadows. I should have liked to follow it further than we did, but the hands of my watch shocked me.

Oh, time — time, and truly Tempus Fugit

This leads to other reflections and confessions. I wondered when I began this journal whether I should find sufficient material to fill it, and I now am discovering that there is more to record than either time or petrol will allow.

Surrey is inexhaustible. You could spend hours pottering about in one particular place, and wondering about it, and asking questions of yourself and of Authority. Why this — why that ? But as I have said before, this very incomplete journal may pique those who ask for more than the mere rush along the road. Eyes, eyes, eyes, and an inquiring spirit. There is no need to fly to Central Africa for exploration. It waits for you thirty miles or so from Piccadilly Circus, and in its human significance and natural beauty it is infinitely satisfying.

On this day, I had planned to cover more ground, but time mocked me, and we had a dinner-date at a particular place and the by-road I had prepared to take advertised itself as unsuitable for motors. " Moses " was precious, and with Stella as my passenger, I dared not risk a breakdown or a bogging, so we had to waste petrol and more time in a circuit. As will happen on such occasions, I came upon features which titillated me as we passed them,

a mess of war mechanism in the lovely parkland between the Ganshall road and the Netley Heights. There was Netley House. And then, beyond Abinger Hammer, where the bank on the left of the road is high I saw a gate and the dark mouth of a tree-shaded trackway.

Stop I must, and stop I did. I climbed up to the path along the top of the bank, and made a discovery that shamed me. In the old days, I had driven along this road scores of times, yet never had I spotted what I saw from the high path. Granted — that the road is narrow and winding and that one has to watch it, yet — I wonder how many other motorists have missed what I had missed. Far down below there lies a delightful pool.

Almost I took off my hat to it.

“Apologies. All my fault that we have not met before.”

But I had that ravine to explore. It was a deep old trackway in the sand, and in places its banks must have been fifteen feet high. It appeared to run in the direction of Hackhurst Downs, but I had no time to follow it for more than fifty yards. Its depth suggested that it might have been used in the days of prehistoric man.

Well, here was adventure for another occasion.

A minute or two later we passed the gates of Abinger Hall, and I had a glimpse of old brick walls and clipped yews, so tantalising when you had no time to pause. But the time would come.

CHAPTER 14

Where To ?

WE started away to remedy the lapses of the previous journey, with more time on our hands, and a trackway to track to its lair. Maybe it would end in a chalkpit, or lead me on such a dance that my rather groggy heart would cry "Chuck it, old man. This damned ditch will be the death of me." Will the young and the earnest among my readers — if I have any, accept the motorists apology for exploring Surrey — on wheels. I know that a twenty mile tramp with a pack on your back is the more manly and serious method of walking with nature, but I — an oldish fellow with a temperamental heart and a blind wife — had to accept "Moses" and physical limitations.

We went by way of Newland's Corner, and I can never refrain from pulling up there and gazing, and I discovered that I had missed something on the previous day, a great yellowish streak on the high ground far away across the valley. It looked like acres of sand, a great tawny scar in the greenness. What was it ? A war-wound ? This blemish would have to be explored.

Strange how colour associates itself with some memory ! That blond streak over yonder brought back to me the memory of a blond young man in shorts and a white shirt sitting with a girl at a table in the tea-house over yonder. I had not noticed them particularly until I had been roused to attention by his resentful, bitter voice, and the words he had uttered.

"This — slavery !"

I had cocked an ear and an eye. What slavery ? And let us change tenses and drop the eternal had. He was a robust, ruddy, healthy looking lad with eyes of an aggressive blueness. The girl was pretty, the tea good, the August day serene and comfortable. I listened in. What was the grievance ? So far as I could gather my lad had to go to work each day as a mechanic in a

garage, vetting and servicing other people's cars. Apparently he considered himself most inadequately paid for the job, and that his skill was wasted upon capitalist cars. The whole social scheme was both invective and ga-ga, but many of you have heard all this before. I was intrigued by the bored face of the girl. It seemed to me that all his furious angry invective was less than sour milk to her, and I wondered. I could have said "Aren't you rather a silky ass to bring a pretty girl to this pleasant spot on a perfect summer day, and waste your time spouting Hyde Park stuff? Why can't you enjoy things? This slavery indeed! What — do you — want?"

Yes, that is easily said, and its effect upon youth might help to make youth even madder. Most of us are leftish in our twenties, and the problem has many complexities. Was the blond hero showing off, or was he resentful because he owned a tandem-bike and not a car? But my Pink Prophet has more profound things to say, that progress is inspired by the hypersensitive, unhappy few, and that happiness is just a honey-pot or drugged wine. Well, it may be so! The urge to alter may be for those whose starched shirts tickle them or whose cushions are stuffed with thorns, and yet my philosophy is otherwise. If the fierce urge is there why spill its froth all over society? Why not use it in accomplishment, self-serving, in the cult of something more joyous?

I know what the answer will be "Yes, damn you, but you had advantages, leisure, perhaps a rich old man behind you. We didn't start fair for the sprint." How ingenious is the assumption that all those who have leisure may use them to accomplish things. They do not. The urge of not-having may be more urgent than possessions. "Yes, this damned slavery," said my lad again. The girl with a bored face, helped herself to another cake.

Are women more realist than man? Are they, by their nature and necessity, more organically wise? One Sage whom I read believes that

woman is always mother to man, bearing with his tantrums, smiling at his grievances — imaginary or otherwise, knowing that man must show off and exhibit his maleness. She bears children, he bears malice.

I have been astonished how jealous of the common man can be of his fellows, and what bitterness and anger he can exhibit when Tom next door comes in for a legacy, or a little bit of money. Praise one working man to another and you will be met with flat-faced displeasure.

I asked Stella for her opinion. She said that did not believe that woman was more realist than man but that she was nearer to nature in the fate that nature had laid upon her. She had more pain to bear and that which might be an erotic incident to man — to her meant motherhood, forethought, more pain, conservation. She asked me to remember that the manifestations of the ego in small girls differed from the ego in boys. A small girl might exude charm, and wheel a doll round in a pram, while a small boy would be playing at building with a mock tommy-gun and a jack-knife.

II

TO please Stella, I overshot the day's mark, meaning to return to it, and passing Crossways Farm, climbed the narrow road to Abinger Hotel. It had memories for both of us, for we had spent the month of May here in the first spring after the other war. May 1919 had begun with snow, to transform itself into a poets month, and we had been very happy here with the mayflower in blossom and the bluebells thick in the woods. It is a charming inn, and the bedroom off the hall had been ours and the hall itself my literary workshop, and today the place was much as ever, save that my dear comrade was blind.

Over yonder was the village stacks by the church's lych-gate and the

grey church itself, and the cherry tree by the pond, and the old pollarded elm and the white faced inn. By special favour we were given tea under the fig tree and it was difficult to believe that twenty six years had passed since I had come back from France as Stella had described me — “Tough and ruddy, but rather stupid!” Tut — Tut! That it appears was what happened to a man who had lived somewhat boisterously in a shirtless “Mess.”

As we sat here in the sunlight I was reminded of yet another incident. I had been reading outside the porch one evening when I had heard a voice declaring in the public bar, a raucous and unpleasant voice, and I had listened to a rustic Red cursing men of business and all their ways. The voice had said that men of business were ruddy rogues who did nothing but go to London, and grovel in filthy lucre, and swindle the working-man. Dear, dear! Next morning I approached our host and with a twinkle said that there seemed to have been a local Bolshevik eloquent in the bar the previous night.

And he had looked me straight in the face, and denied that any such language had been used. Mendacity in excelsis! I concluded that he must have believed me to have been a business man!

The inn's population had been interestingly composite. It had included an artist and his wife, he — like myself — just back from the war, a party of earnest spinsters who were very much Wind on the Heath-Brothers, and talked excitedly about birds and botany. One lady was an authority on the siskins, and I had never seen a siskin. Then, there were two elderly couples, and a dear old dame with a lady companion who used to sit herself down at the parlour piano and sing with catastrophic vigour, and rouse in the artist a desire to throw a hand-grenade in at the window.

The artist was a most likeable person, both colourful, sensitive and tough. I remember asking him his opinion of the men who had served under him.

“ Oh, awkward brutes.”

And that was all I could get from him.

III

HAVE patience, dear reader, have patience ! You may have shouted — “ Ha, I’ve caught the old scoundrel out. He never went near Abinger Commons, or he would not have written all the guff, and given himself away so completely.”

Quite so. I will confess that I wrote a paragraph somewhat previously, and allowed myself the naughtiness of literary prevision. I knew the place so well that I thought I could play tricks with it, and how wrong I was many of you may know.

Well, let us get into reverse, especially so on this day in June when St. Basie floats down to us on seraphic wings. I wanted to drive over Neatly Health, and see whether all that wildness had suffered and to resurrect more than one memory, so we took the turning off the Effingham-Horsley road, and followed the familiar woodland way. Soon after Rowbarns Manor and I knew that the Army had been here. Notices shouted at you — apparently it had been a closed area. And then we struck those black beasts staged along the road under the trees, scores of them, like elephant carcasses, each with its mouth covered with a brown tarpaulin. Munition stores — I suppose, and fire-fighting appliances, and what not.

So, we came to that lovely corner where the strange old birch tree plays at being a contortionist and trackings had spread into green gloom. I saw a hut labelled — “ Office ” a mound of sand and flint, and a great source of raw subsoil. I got out. Close by, a fire-gong, blown by the wind, gave out an occasional sly note.

Yes, the old birch tree was there, but two of the trackings had become narrow, asphalted roads. I strolled across to the mound of sand and the saucer from which the healthy soil had been removed. I looked for possible flint implements and found none. What the devil had the Army been doing here? Filling sandbags ?

A particular memory came back to me very vividly. It had happened in August 1940. Stella and I had come to the Netty Woods to escape from the fear that seemed to hang over the country. We had thought that we should find peace and assuagement here, and it had not been so, for we had found ourselves in a gloomy piece of woodland, fenced in a darkened by beeches and belts of Douglas Fir. The trackway too had been black and sombre, and spotted with rutting puddles. The same feeling had come to us of dread and disaster. Invasion had been in the air, and I had got the feeling that one might see grey figures moving amid the trees, German paratroops, sinister and shadowing shapes.

This — in our England !

I did not remind Stella of that grim memory. We drove on, past more and more black-corrugated beasts, and so to the steep and winding hill road that drops down to Shere. We passed a blockhouse, and concrete tank-blocks now laid aside. Peace had returned to the green and secret place, so solitary now, and so mysterious. Old yews, old beeches, a little green valley deep below the trees, and a glimmer with sunlight at the moment. There was no haunting terror here today. Even that insolent and sneering beast of a " Haw-Haw " was helpless and in our hands.

So, through Shere, and I pulled up for a moment on the level road beyond the village to take a look at the war-menageries still blatant in the parkland. It made one think of a Heath Robinson show gone mad, and above and beyond all this mechanical muck the high woods towered green and silent, and perhaps contemptuous.

So, on to the pool beyond Abinger Hammer, and the deep trackway cutting into the hillside above it. I take it that Abinger Hammer is a relic of iron smelting and a forging days and at the pool was a hammer-pond. The bank which carries the farm road is obviously artificial, and the back of the pool much higher than the watercress beds below. Moreover, there is that suggestive brick building and its iron sluice which asks for a wheel below it. Not that this building was of the iron period, but it does hint at some predecessor.

The pool is a delightful piece of water, with its water-plants and reflection. Westwards lie the watercress beds with a raised path down the middle. A swan was busy having a fine old time and a girl was trailing a sack by one of the beds. Do swan eat watercress ? And was she permitted to enjoy a free feed ?

Now for the tracking. I squeezed past the field-gate and climbed. Whither would this miniature ravine lead me, and what should I find above ? The great ditch grew shallower as I ascended and towards the shoulder of the hill it faded out, and left me looking over another field-gate at a pleasant stretch of grass and woods, half meadow, half parkland. No quarry here, no house, no sign of any trackway to lose me on. The only live things I saw were a magpie and a missel-thrush. I rather felt that I had been swindled.

But there remained a problem. What had been the purpose of that deep cut in the sand ? And if it had been a packhorse trail, why climb up a dark dampy ditch when the whole hillside was at your service ? Yet, it seemed to link itself with man, and could not be the creation of running water, for I saw no sign of a spring. Had it some connection with the pool below and had iron ore been carried down it to the hammer-pond ? Perhaps and as to the hammer-pond and the fences, etc., where are the slag heaps and ash ? Maybe they are there somewhere, and someone wiser than I am knows of them.

We ran on as far as the crossroads above Crossways Farm. You see the chimneys as you approach, and in the meadow below the road lies another lovely pool. Always I associate it with yellow water-flies in flower and they were in flower today.

I pulled up beyond the farm, where the brook passes under the road, and the water here does "babble" and ooze its way through the green growth of the meadows. I had noticed that the great door in the high wall of "Crossways" was closed, and in the old days it had been open, and one had a view of the old house and the courtyard garden. Or is my memory at fault and was there an iron gate there before the war, and a gate that has gone down in bombs? What a wall is this, brown sandstone, with a tile course let into it, and a rounded top, beautifully mellow and with a satisfying solidity. Wild sedum grows on it, and ivy leaved toadflax. But that door! Should I open it and look? I will confess that I funk'd it, or rather I felt sensitive about prying in these so public days. Wall and door were for the exclusion of the casual and the curious and I respected their privacy. Yet, without snooping, you can see several of the features of this most lovely house, the chimneys, the stone roof, the windows in the gable ends, the fine stringcourse, the top of the great buttresses. In its own way, "Crossways" is unique, and worthy of the most mysterious of Dianne.

So, on up the steep lane to Abinger Common, and to my confession. I pulled up just past the Inn, noticing that there was a red patch of new tiling on the roof. The pond was there, and the cherry tree looking just a little shabby, and the pollarded elm, and the fig tree. I strolled back and across to look at the little church, and stood still. The place was a shattered shell, or half a shell. A bomb had massacred it.

I was shocked and astonished. It seemed hardly credible that a Flying Bomb should have chanced to fall in this isolated spot and upon that poor, innocent, little old church. Stella and I had sat in one of its pews during

the happy days when we had rested here after the last war. Who could have prophesised so tragic a slaughter? I went to explore. The roof was off the lych gate, and from the near gable of the ruins, a little Union Jack featured. A good emblem that. Barbed wire had been strung about the wreck, for the safety of the curious. The chancel stood, with its roof in ruins, and the wall surfaces blasted, but the tower had gone, and the nave was a shell. Heaps of rubble lay about, and I saw a pile of shattered beams and rafters, some of it worm-eaten. Grasses had suffered badly. A tree, that I remembered as a cypress or a sequoia was a ragged stump.

I'll confess to stepping over the wire and entering the church and here a thing pleased me. The mural tablet attached to the wall commemorating the men who fell in the old war was there. Good business. The names of the sacred dead had defied the filthy and cruelty of man.

I wandered down the path to the steps and the iron railings. The railings were twisted or gone, but the steps remained. My last memory of them was of some village children sitting here, and I had given them sixpence for sweets. The lime tree which had shaded the steps was a bloated wreck, but bravely putting out new green shoots.

I went down to the Manor. The big hall-like building had been half wrecked, and was under repair. Many of the Manor windows had been blown in and were sheeted up.

Passing back through the churchyard, I saw the figure of an angel on a high pedestal. The lower half of one of her wings had been blown off, and had been laid neatly beside her.

A box hung at the gate, inviting contributions towards the restoration. I dropped some silver into it, and confronted my problem. Should I tell Stella of the tragedy? I decided not to tell her. There was enough ugliness in the modern world without letting her know what had happened here.

I went and spoke to her. I said I would go and see if they could give us tea at the inn. The little place seemed very sad and empty, but I met a genial old gentleman who told me what had happened. A Flying Bomb had crashed on the church in August 44. The inn had had to be closed for some time.

I said, "Well, we shan't see another war."

He replied — "You won't, but I may."

I raised the question of ages, to find that I was a year his senior. He chuckled.

"You must have lived a very peaceful, innocent life."

I said, "I write books, and garden and farm. And I have a very good wife."

"You must have," quoth he.

We did not take tea outside under the fig tree as I had stated in my poor attempt at prevision, but in the dining room, a room that was so familiar, yet somewhat sad. There are people who derive pleasure and a kind of sensational pleasure from other people's disasters, and who like to chatter over the tragedy as they might gabble about rationing, but the death of that little church had saddened me. Stella and I were reaching an age when so many singular and notable figures were passing and this county church was like some grand old Surrey gentleman whom a super-lout had hit on the head. I wanted to get Stella away from the place and into an atmosphere less shattered.

I looked at my watch and was astonished as to the way time fled. I had much more to do. So, we paid our bill and turned "Moses" nose downhill, and back past "Crossways" to the blind and formidable crossroads just above it. I was taking the steep road up to the White Downs. Twenty or more years ago, I remembered the lane as a rough and rutty track, with hedges hanging over it, but now it is paved. In those days it was unfit in many places even for a bicycle.

We climbed up the steep and winding road and suddenly I had a glimpse of the distance through a wide gap on the right hand hedge. Just ahead the lane crosses the railing by a bridge. I got out and went to look and stood spellbound. I don't think I have ever seen anything more spacious and lovely in all my Surrey days, The great valley stretched away into the distance, with the Downs rising tremendously above it. Two Church spires stood out, Raunae and Westcott, like slim grey obliques. It was a Constable sky, cloud shadows and patches of brilliant sunlight, and gorgeous landscape, yet serene and gentle in its splendance.

I thought — "Stella must see this." Which goes to show how one reverts instinctively to the past. She could not see it, poor dear, but I could tell her of it and she might feel the spell. I went back to the car, helped her out, and collected a ground-sheet that I carried, and spread it just within the ledge. We sat down side by side and I began to tell her what lay before us, and how those two church spires seemed to give meaning and mystery to the landscape. At the moment the sun was shining right along the Downs, and the valley was in the shadow. Almost the two church spires had become silver.

Suddenly, she asked me a question.

"What was the matter with Abinger?"

"Matter?"

"Yes, you were disappointed."

How devilish quick she was in divining a mood.

"The place seemed rather sad."

She put out a hand, and let it rest upon my knee.

"But — this — is different."

"Absolutely flawless and fresh — How was it that I never saw it before."

"Just a gap in the hedge — which wasn't there."

"Yes, I suppose so. And in those days I was either shoving a bike up the

hill, or watching the ruts as I free-wheeled down. It makes me think that there are just the same sort of gaps in consciousness."

I looked at her face. It was serene. Almost, it seemed that she was feeling the scene as I saw it.

Well are these heights named the White Downs, and the war has left white scars here. We went on up the hill and I stopped again to explore a track. It led me into a vast old chalkpit, and lying derelict there was what appeared to be a burnt-out gun carrier. But I found a some Persian Buttercups, of a pure yellow, and I took, two of the flowers back to Stella.

Up again, and out again. I gather from the white gashes in the hillside that here was line of defence. I had stopped at a sharp bend and pulled on to the turf. A broad white excavation lay before me, and when I explored it, I found more than chalk. For here, and what must have been the low parapet I was given a view which as perhaps the finest in Surrey.

I could see what I had seen below and so much more. The great wooded ridge soared east and west across the valley, dark with pieces, and westwards the view lost itself across the valley, dark with pines, and westwards the view lost itself in dim distances. I saw half buried lengths of wire-netting, and queer strands of wire and the great chalk bank, which I thought it was wise to leave untouched. But, there were all kinds of chalk-loving plants here, wild climatis, wayfaring tree, blue veroines, yellow trefoil, and clips of purple flowered bellarorama, and a green queer plant that I had never seen before, somewhat resembling a thistle with bright green leaves sharply serrated along the edges.

This road over the White Downs, goes at the crossroads between Ranmore and East Horsley, close to Dunley Hill. We took the Effingham road, which is innocent of change until you come to the long beech avenue. It might have been the lane of thirty years ago. The beech avenue north of Effingham is unique, and when I used to cycle along it in the old days, I

had felt myself back in France, for many of the French roads are treed like this. Beauty it has, and a kind of ghostliness, a place to pass through and yet not to be lived in. I dare say many of you have noticed how such beech groves have a green chilliness and that a breeze blows through them even on a still and sunny day. They seem full of voices, sudden fluttering of the leaves, and a sense of other presences.

New homes have risen here on the edge of the old arable land. They are in the new arty style, but both homely and aloof and yet I should not have chosen to dwell here between the beeches and the bareness of the chalky fields. One would be too much on the edge of two wildernesses, with the wind coming over the great spaces to sing a Cassandra song amid the beeches. The old folk did not build in such a place. It might be what in Berkshire they used to call " Unked, " strange and unfriendly, and resenting the too near presence of man.

But I dare to suppose that the dwellers here would not agree with me, would think me freakish and fussy, and I wish them well with their homes and gardens.

CHAPTER 15

Send - Sutton Place - Old Woking

THE name of Send puzzles many people. Why — Send ? And withers and what ?

The derivation is very simple, just Sand.

Send has three titles to fame. It was the birth place of Lumpy Stevens, the cricketer, now forgotten, for its basket making — which has ceased, and for its carrots — which in Victorian days were so notable that they were saluted in a music-hall ditty. Send Marsh appears to have been one great osier willow bed, whence came the withers for baskets. It was drained, and is no longer a marsh.

Modern Send has one or two surprises for you. Who would suspect it of owning a Film Studio And close to the studio, stands a Poultry Breeding Station, used during the war by the Ministry of Agriculture, and famous for its pullets, especially crosses between Rhode Island Reds and Light Sussex. Half a mile away towards Old Woking lies a notable smith who will hammer out iron gates for your garden, a smith who is an expert and an artist.

The easiest way of reaching Send Manor, which is the gem of this struggling village, is to take the first turning on the right from the Portsmouth Road after passing Ripley, two or three hundred yards before the left hand turning to West Clandon. You come almost at once to the triangular Green, and the fine old red house — the Manor.

The front garden has the appearance of being part of the Green, quite a democratic garden, friendly and without affection. The gates and railings were removed many years ago. I looked at the old house lovingly, its gables and cloak of creepers, its clipped box trees and garden wall, and the splendid wisteria which grows by the porch.

I wandered up to the porch. There were green cushions on its seats, another friendly gesture, as though all comers were invited to sit down. I saw a iron torch-holder and the plaque of one of the ancient insurance companies, and an iron bell-pall which was broken, but the great door carried a massive knocker. I knocked and the sound the thing gave our made me feel that I had made too much noise.

A nice child came to the door. I presented a card and asked if I might see the garden. Would I please wait. I stood back from the house and looking it over again, saw the gnomes and figures of a sun-dial half lost in the foliage of wisteria.

The nice child returned. Would I come in and wait. I thanked her, crossed the green to the car and brought it and Stella round to the house. We entered. We passed through the hall into a room on the left, I guiding her towards a stately chair covered with French petal point and gras point. Beside it stood an old spinning wheel, and directly Stella's hands touched the fabric of the chair, I saw her smile. She stood up and passed those very sensitive fingers of hers over it.

I gave her the colours and the pattering, with the two central figures in Georgian dress, and presently one of her hands touched the spinning wheel. She bent to it and gave me a demonstration of how the thing worked, where the wool was placed and how the yarn was drawn out and wound upon the bobbin. I felt that we were taking liberties with our unknown host or hostess, but Stella's touch was so gentle and her pleasure in this blind-game so innocent, that anyone would have forgiven her.

Then our host appeared, a sturdy, Roman headed gentleman, immaculate in a brown lounge suit, with everything else to match. I had to explain the invasion and he accepted it, and looked with compassionate kindness at Stella. He took charge. We passed out into the garden, a garden that had gone wild, but its wildness did not matter. Roses and iris could bloom in

a wildness of feathery grasses.

He led us to the great barn which now combines the function of music room, dance hall, and cinema. He began to give us the history of the place, so far as he had been able to disentangle it. He said that Henry the 8th had been placed for education in a near-by religious house, and that his mother, coming to visit him from London, and feeling the need of a rest-house of her own, bought the manor, and built the house, the original house. Its subsequent history was intriguing. Good King Hal, grown elderly, and being in his cups at some merry feast, promised to present the Manor to the competition who should prove himself champion in a coming tithing-match, and the prize fell to a Portuguese.

How insular are our prejudices, but I felt peeved that a Dago should have toppled good Englishmen out of their saddles. And what did the Portuguese do with the property? Resold it — apparently, and the Manor became Barlow, the family who held West Clandon. The Portuguese coat-of-arms decorates a window, with those of Onslow, and Delaware. Our host pointed to some of the old timber, and said that he believed that it had been ship's timber, the ribs and braces. But how did ships timber reach Send? The great barn doors have been replaced by a fireplace and a big window, and no longer could wagons pull in with their loads, or the flails thud on the threshing-floor.

This great barn is a symbol of the life of those more simple days. In fact, it might be said that such a building was one of the centre pieces of the rustic world, the barn and the church and upon each was lavished loving craftsmanship. And what labour was entailed! Look up at the great oak beams, the rafters and braces and remember that all the timber was shaped by hand, laboriously in a saw-pit. How long did it take to square up a huge beam from the trunk of an oak? No pressing of a button here. Which leads one into the old debate upon the saving of labour and sweat, and the

sparing of men's body. Is such mechanical help all to the good ?

Maybe that in some measure it is, if the leisure is put to the other uses. But there may be a dreadful fallacy in this creed of softness, and that the sparing of the flesh may not be good for the soul. Man is not a mechanism, and the new power that mechanics has given him has produced — well — we all know what. I have seen its effects upon man who have been presented with the power in the control of some massive machine, and I have found in their faces a certain crude bestiality. I must, crash, crash through ! How different were the faces of old shepherds and countrymen and the older craftsman who had to rely as the cunning of their hands. No, I do not believe that too much sparing of the flesh is good. During the war, I have had to labour with my hands, and found myself fitter and happier for it. The belly has to earn its rations.

As you stand in what was the farmyard of the manor farm, and is now part of the garden, you have about you the whole simple pattern of that other world. The great barn is on your right, and in front of you runs the cowshed with its undulating tiled roof. Beyond it lies the pond where cows and horses were watered. Turn right and you see a building perched on rickstones, the granary, raised to balk the ravages of rats. As we passed back towards the house, our host pointed out the contrast between the old and the new brickwork. The old bricks were smaller, and had — of course — the mellowness of age.

Looking across the green you see a charming timber and plaster house with an attractive garden. Our host explained that he had had it restoned and that his manager lived there. So much for a man of enterprise and affairs who did good things, and by his energy and foresight made places in the world for other man. His may be an unpopular figure these days when enterprise and the taking of risks appear to be regarded as social sins. The Squire, the Duke, the True Blue Tory ! Well, such men made

the island what it is and I have a feeling that if the tradition dies, the country will be the poorer for it.

II

IT was Thomas Hardy weather, green grey gloom, and whispering winds and scuds of rain, when we came to the gates of Sutton Place. They came open before you mysteriously, and with a silent consenting courtesy. So, some hand within the lodge pressed a lever and the iron gates swung slowly back to let our small car enter.

Now rain and wind in June may be normal to this island but they have a depressing effect upon me, and make me see the very greenness of woods and meadows as Hardy saw it, and convey a far eternal tragedy, scarcely concealing the lovely indifference of Nature to the fate of man. Not that Nature even troubles to cheat us of our illusions, though we may pretend to ourselves that it is so, and speaks of struggles and creative effort, which may make for the ultimate martyrdom of man. There is one simple picture in one of Hardy's books, which, in its utter and bold realism expresses his philosophy — each year the cottagers planted his spring cabbages, inevitably to be eaten by the rabbits.

“Yes,” the pragmatic may say — “but now we have wire netting. Man always finds an answer.”

I was in a Cassandra mood on this wet grey day with a sad little wind blowing through the trees and the moist grasses. England had been great, and suddenly she seemed to have become little, a squawking, political brat, red faced and smelling of soiled napkins.

We had come through infinite perils, and now yet another peril was upon us, a peril of our own making — politics. The wet gray sky, and the

complaining wind, and this old English mansion and its great garden seemed part of the picture.

For, its creator, the first of the Westons, had been a political person, and had served his King in the crushing and dispensing of a great country. The Religious Houses were to go, with all that they had stood for — books, learning, the cult of the soil, spiritual values, the healing of the sick, the provision of guest-houses for those who travelled. It may have been agreed, and perhaps with some justification, that the Mankind would have become decadent and parasitic, and so — it passed away and in its passing gave birth to new aristocrats and new possessions, and for stately places such as Sutton.

Now, the Suttons of this modern world were being condemned as parasitic, and history was repeating itself and as I looked at the great house, said to be one of the first specimens of domestic architecture in the South, I wondered what the end would be. Constructive or destructive? That — to me — is the pith of the modern problems. Who will control this stormy future — men of wisdom and goodwill, or a crowd of snarling louts? Yes, which?

“The Army is completely Leftish,” a lad home from the front, had said to me.

Well, so it was in the last war, and to be young is to be for new moods and methods. Would the beautiful old building with its decorative pattern, be adapted to new users? I could visualized such uses, and applaud them. The red mansion might become benignly Red. Yes, if one can keep our tempers, and rise above envy and hatred.

But, on this wet grey day I doubted, as I walked with Stella into the old walled garden with its bathing pool. This was a modern touch, but pleasantly so, and all else was old and lovely and serene. Even the brick walls were potted with the past, where gardeners now long dead had

hammered in nails to hold the fruit trees.

You pass through another door in the brick wall and find yourself in all that stateliness of grass, clipped yews, and gray green distances. I cannot conceive of any vista that is more restful and yet stimulating than this vast stretch of turf like a great runway leading toward the Downs. Wander to the right, and you have the splendid cedars, Atlantic and Sebanas, and the pool with its hedges and water-lilies, and its two figurines and its seats. Repose — everywhere a gracious solitude, quiet breathing. I suppose that the furious and vociferous idealist might be bored here or roused to demagogic indignation, but I would like to see all our political Seers restricted for a month in some such place as this, far from the maddening crowd, alone to look and feel and think. Might not some of the deliberate dignity of Sutton, its green colours seep into thin souls and persuade them to remember that such serenity and quiet splendour are the product of centuries, and that an urban, cabbage-patch cannot be transformed — all in five minutes — by spoutings from a platform?

Stella's mood was for sitting on a seat by the pool, listening to sounds that might have been inaudible or without meaning to the crowd. This was as a Garden Show Day, and yet we seemed to be the only visitors and our tickets were numbered 5 and 6. There was a selflessness about Stella that touched me. Maybe she dreaded her blindness becoming a chain, but she was ever content to sit and send me wandering.

“Go and look, John, I'm quite happy here.”

I wanted to see the wild garden sloping to the Wey, a green wildness that in the spring must be beautiful beyond belief. Now, summer was here and there was less colour amid the greenness, and all the flowering trees had shed their petals. As I went, I heard a peacock calling, but I could not see the bird though I remembered that it would sit on the top of a clipped yew hedge like some decorative creature in the formal scheme. Peacocks are

for spacious places as their somewhat raucous cry can keep a whole community awake. I recall one curious meeting with a peacock. I was confronted one day by a cock bird walking across our lawn with stately confidence. Where it had come from — God knows, and how ! We had high wire on fences round the garden and the wood. I had addressed the bird — “ Well, my dear, where the devil have you come from and where are you going ? ” It had looked at me and walked solemnly on, and all that I could do was to conduct it down through the vegetable garden to the back gate leading into the lane. It had followed me, and walked out through the gate which I had held open. I had never seen it again, and met anyone who had seen it. A most mysterious bird !

The one feature at Sutton Place which I cannot find pleasing is the gigantic statue — copied from the Italians — of Perseus slaying Medusa. It may be good and right to slay Medusa, but mangled neck and spouts of blood are not for so peaceful a place as this. I would have all statues benign and calm, pensive, and poised on some graceful act. There seems to be enough horror in our worlds without perpetuating it in stark violence in stone.

I found the river, and scrambled about the green wilderness, but I did not wish to leave Stella alone too long, but when I returned to the pool and its lilies, she was not alone. A rosy faced small boy was sitting beside her, and she was holding his hand.

He was a nice child, and belonged to someone about the place, and it would appear that he had guided Stella round the rose garden and the pool. He had expressed astonishment at our paying a shilling each to see the place. A shilling was an awful lot of money !

He was eager that Sutton Place should earn its shilling. Had we seen the bathing pool and the old mulberry tree ? We had. Well, had we seen the ponies ? No, we had not seen the ponies. Well, he would show us the ponies.

He was such a little man of a fellow, so serious and paternal, one of those sensitive yet sturdy kids who would be described by the mystics as bearing an old soul inside him, that we had to play up. He led us back to the walled garden and holding Stella by the hand, guided her with fatherly care, through the doorway, and along the path to the further door. I followed. Being a gardener and lover of order and of peace, I will confess that I do not as a rule favour small boys, and have on occasion regarded them as the natural enemies of birds, cats, and mature men, but this child was an exception.

He piloted us round to the stables, and opening the door, insisted on our entering and being introduced. No need to be nervous. The ponies were sweet tempered beasts, and so they were with him, a child who was fearless and who loved them.

It was I who did the courtesies, and patted and rubbed noses. I have always been a little shy of strange horses, but there was no need for shyness here. My introduction had been good and adequate, and no teeth were shown.

Then, I had a inspiration. I felt for a shilling and found one. I presented it to our friend.

“Something for the guide.”

His solemn little face crackled into a smile.

“Oh, thanks, awfully.”

He had not expected that shilling, or sought it, and as he waved us goodbye, I thought how good it would be for the future of all of us if man could remain as un-commercial as that child.

III

I SUPPOSE I ought to record one or two historic details that are connected

with Sutton Place. It was built about 1525 by Sir Richard Weston, servant and friend of Henry 8th. Although his son was sent to the block by Henry for being the lover of Anne Boleyn, the father retained his position and influence. His son had married the daughter of Sir Thomas Arundell, who also had been executed.

None the less a grandson of Sir Richard entertained Queen Bess at Sutton.

At one time the house appears to have possessed a tower, but it had to be pulled down because it had become unsafe.

IV

ERIC GARDNER has a weird story to tell. It seems that Sir Richard Weston, during the destruction of the religious houses, was active at York, and that York possessed a very venerable and potent relic, the head of the thigh bone of St. Peter. It was set with jewels, and it disappeared. Now, when some of the wainscoting at Sutton was taken down for replacement or repair, the workmen discovered a strange object concealed there. It was the head of a human femur, but minus the jewels !

V

WE took the Portsmouth road again, and turned off through Send to Old Woking. I have to confess that I have driven through Old Woking scores of times, but with the blight of New Woking upon me, I have always passed upon my way. Only one occasion had I stopped to look when Stella was with me, where the bridge crosses the river in the shade, and at a particular old house which had interested me. I will leave you to find that house for yourselves, if the mood moves you. It is of gray stone, has a high garden

wall, and a mysterious shut-up look, almost suggesting the aloofness of tragedy. Stella and I stopped near it one day, and went snooping. The place had the appearance of being deserted, and so well screened was it that snooping did not produce results. The shabby, secret dignity of the old house moved me to wonder whether it concealed some human sorrow. It looked like a house that should possess a ghost.

We had wandered down the lane beside it, when we fell in with a countryman wheeling his bike. We asked him about the house. Was it derelict, deserted? It was not. Two old people lived alone there, yes, had lived there for years. And that was all that we could get from him, but his reticence only added to the mystery. What secret did the old place hold?

IF I MARRIED AGAIN

—I'd Pick My Wife!



Declares WARWICK DEEPIING,

The Novelist

The Divorce Court has reopened again to its business of sundering marriages that have failed to survive the test of time.

Day after day the heavy list of broken romances is reduced, and couples who started off together so happily, so confidently, leave separately to take up their places in a new scene.

Here Warwick Deeping, the novelist, ranges himself on the side of romance and sentiment in marriage . . . and humor—qualities without which disaster is inevitable.

WHEN the question, "If you could marry again—I" was put to me, it seemed both a little impertinent and superfluous, for it is in man's nature to take all questions personally. Because—to me—the ending of the particular comradeship which I now enjoy would be so final that I might regard life itself as ended.

Imagine the sympathetic and cheerful tongue remarking: "My dear old man, you must marry again."

The advice would be sardonic, for I should have to remarry a woman who was dead, or one who was raised from the dead. Or, should I not still feel mated to one who was with me in the spirit, and resent the intrusion of some kind alien who would be little better than a stranger or a nurse?

Ashes That Are Sacred

If marriage has been what it should be, one cannot marry again in the sacramental sense. The ashes are sacred and final.

But I am expected to be both impersonal and personal. In exploring the impossibility of a second marriage—I should be a creature of dry projections. It would be a quest of all those characteristics which go to make a memory immortal.

What should I ask for in the woman who was to be my second wife?

Looks? Yes, because one falls in love



Modern girls drive racing cars, but there are some of us who still cherish the old-world gentleman.

with a face. Brown hair, blue eyes, a sensitive delicacy, a suggestion of fragility, grace, dignity. A woman's hands are important, so are her lips. Both should be the hands and the lips of the artist.

Artist In The Home

She may be the artist in the home, the maker of music, the needlewoman, a dreamer in colours and cushions. Also, she would be the artist in the cult of her physical self. She would love dress and her complexion, and all those feminine nicenesses that wear like some beautiful fabric.

She would not let her face become a venerable ruin. It is not necessary. Faces can remain as fresh as flowers. They grow mature, but some faces never wither.

As to her personality, what should be its crowning character? Most certainly—gentleness.

Some of us still cherish the old world gentleman. Split it, and we have the quality that still is woman's most potent weapon. And by gentleness, one does not mean insipid meekness.

No one can be more devastating than the gentle woman when she speaks burning words. They burn because, when gentleness is aflame, we know that we have good reason to feel guilty. People ask me: "But are there any gentle women these days? Is not that very old-fashioned?"

Possibly. Modern woman is so prag-

If a man is something of a soldier, he does not want to marry a soldier. He asks for a contrast—perhaps for something that is different from and better than himself. He may not mind love keeping him in order, but he does object to being drilled.

I think he will ask as I do for gentleness; also, for understanding, for understanding begets its like. His mate will not talk too much. She will not ask him fool questions—and then—of course—she will tell her things.

Picture Of Sentiment

She will be more interested in her house and her garden than in the golf club or her bridge parties. She will symbolize serenity. She will transcend sex. She will help man to transcend the mischievous devil of sex in himself.

The old sentimental picture! Well, why not? And why sentimental? Have our conscientious objectors produced paradises? Were our mothers and grandmothers such poor creatures, mute, tormented shadows of the male? Hardly.

A certain freedom has come to women, a freedom that is admirable, and the wiser men among the moderns welcome it.

It is good that women should handle money, and run their show, and wear short skirts. It is good that they should not giggle in corners. It is almost good that they should vote, though I have heard wise women argue against the franchise.

Every wise woman knows that her unrecorded franchise is worth much more than a cross on a piece of paper. The working woman to whom her mate hands over the weekly wage has a franchise that is real.

When Man Is In Trouble

Man is not always a fool. At fifty he should know what he wants, and if he has got it he will wish to install it in a little temple of his own and light a lamp before it. He will secretly treasure the gentleness and the wise beneficence of his sanctuaries.

He will go to it when he is in trouble. He will also go to it when he is feeling gay. He will laugh in it, and perhaps be scolded. There are only one or two people in the world who can scold us to our profit.

But his mate will have her some of humor. One cannot live with a domestic Blue Book. If we are feeling foolish, we ask for someone who can fool with us, and not say—"Alfred, don't be silly." Life can be a silly business at times, and we survive by being silly as well as by being serious.

A personal confession—perhaps I think I know quite a number of men who—if they were asked the question: "Who will you marry next time?" would reply with divine silliness—

"Marry? Why—my wife—of course."

mafic. She flies, she drives racing cars, she hits a ball hard, she elbows man in business. She says what she thinks, and she may say it very forcibly. Her mate—if she has one—may be rather an appendage.

Personally, I have always been prejudiced against playing the part of an appendage. If a man is a constructive and exalting devil, he does not mate with a constructive and exalting female. Such unions do not mix.

But it does seem to me that there are a great number of women in the world today to whom one applies the adjective—"Formidable."

And Perhaps Be Slain

They are armed; they wear helmets; they brandish weapons; they have the voices and the airs of sergeant-majors.

I—as somewhat primal man—put my back to the wall in the presence of formidable women. I know that if, by any mischance, I were mated to one of them, the old club-culture would be restored. I should smile that woman until she ceased to be formidable, or perhaps the Amazon would slay me.



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THE TRIUMPH OF AN IDEAL.

The World Jamboree, which will be opened to-day by the Duke of Connaught, is a wonderful affair; but it is not nearly so wonderful as the event which it celebrates—the coming of age of the Boy Scout movement. It is, indeed, an extraordinary achievement to have succeeded in gathering together 50,000 boys, representing 42 nations, from every part of the world. But the remarkable thing is that these boys, gathered from the ends of the earth, divided by every sort of difference in language, class, racial standing and tradition, are united in a common ideal. Youth is an idealistic age. But it is profoundly reserved; and it is the triumph of Sir Robert Baden-Powell to have found a means of expressing that idealism by methods which appeal to the boy. He has found, indeed, sanctions for the things which the boy instinctively wishes to do. He has given them end and purpose, and invested them with an altruism to the final development of which no one can place a limit.

Even if the Boy Scout movement had merely succeeded in finding happy out-door activities for boys it would have been fully justified itself. But the Scouts' Promise is the foundation not only of patriotism but also of that world-wide citizenship which is the dream of all idealists; and the movement has set its face from the first against any military, denominational, political or class colour. All such descriptions, negative and positive, entirely fail to convey the healthy causal spirit which is the genius of the movement. Without that it could never have succeeded in enlisting the allegiance of so large a number of normal boys. It has, of course, barely touched the fringe of the world's youth. But now it has come of age and celebrated its majority by a unique assembly, we may look to see it extend its territory rapidly. While it is true to its ideals, nothing but good can come of this development, which covers a field in which lie the seeds of the future of the world's peace.

Conducted by Dr. E. LYTTLETON and Mr. J. L. HODSON

WARWICK DEEPIING on the WORLD OF THE UNBORN

The famous Novelist, Author of "Sordell & Son," and "Old Pybus"—who was trained as a doctor—approaches the subject from a very human angle, as all his readers will expect.

Must Mankind Overcrowd?

Do Children necessarily bring Happiness?
are two of the questions he raises.

I THINK it will be agreed that our human relationships and our civilization depend upon each other. The whole history of man lies in his struggle to control both himself and his environment.

Man is the great interloper. For thousands of years his interference was more like the playing of a child in some forest clearing. He hunted; he evolved a primitive agriculture; he created handicrafts, and cities and states. He had his codes and his conventions, and to a man of those unenforced days his code had appeared sacred and final.

But with the advent of modern science and the industrial age, man's interference involved him in unforeseen necessities. He grew in power and numbers; he swayed. The adventurous individualism of the early Victorians wore its morality with a sort of fine and contented union. Yes, and in spite of that. But just as the stress of those very crowded days, man has begun to realize that his interference has involved him in all sorts of other interferences.

CONTROL—AND SELF-CONTROL.

We have entered the age of control, a State slavery—which, however much it may attempt to gloss over the grimness of the reality, is yet inevitable. Control has become critical. Even in the evolution of the machine we have lost partial control, and are still in a hurry wondering how to regain it. We legislate by the league. We pour out acts to deal with this and that. The most pestilential of plagues—a petting mill officialdom—threatens to become endemic.

But what of the control of sex, of our domestic relationships? Possibly we have tried to shirk this question, to go on in the old ways, to tell "Nature" as the supreme goddess. We have both followed Nature and have interfered with her, and since the very existence of our civilization implies interference, interference will increase. We control food, water, disease, the anti-social person.

We come to the control of birth, and instantly the pot is in danger of boiling over. The problem is so intimate, seems so personal an affair, is so penetrated by prejudices and emotion, that the subject is treated emotionally. We who advocate it are said to be blasphemous against the most sacred instincts of humanity. Yes, instincts! But the

whole problem of civilised living is the controlling of instinct.

ELBOW ROOM NECESSITY.

Our very social compact limits us. Any compact implies limitation. When masses of men and women agree to live together under certain controlled conditions, limitation is inevitable. It may be relative and gradual, but none the less real. And it is increasing. We have to set bounds to the greedy and the irresponsible, the bully, and the rampant egoist.

Birth control is in action—now. It seems to me to be a quiet, communal response to the crowd conditions of to-day. It is a reaction to environment, an attempt to control environment.

Talk to an intelligent working man and you will find that he understands certain things.

That quality may be more important than quantity.

That in a garden you should not attempt to grow six plants where there is only soil space for three.

That unlimited child bearing and child rearing is not a blessing but a curse to the mother in the home.

That—in the main—those people who allow instinct free play—on the very neighbours he desires to avoid.

Dr. Lyttleton has placed a finger on one of the realities when he says that the modern demand is for more self expression, more happiness: "I want to have a good time."

THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS.

One might argue for ever about the nature of happiness. Personally I believe that the wilful quest of happiness to be the most fatal of illusions. Happiness is somehow the perfume of a life well grown and well lived. Set out to extract the mere essence, and it eludes you. Does the limitation of families make for happiness? Does it imply

TO-MORROW

Mr. J. B. S. HALDANE,
Reader in Bio-Chemistry at Cambridge.

Others who will follow:

Mrs. Philip Snowden
Miss Sheila Kaye-Smith
Mr. M. R. Carns
Mr. Miles Malleson
Mr. Harold Cox



MR. WARWICK DEEPIING.

mere selfishness? Or does it suggest a wise kindness towards the abused? That question can only be answered by each individual.

Do children always bring happiness?

Let us try to be honest. Personally, my experience of life has gone to prove that the childless marriage is often the happier one. I have said so before, and received abundant abuse. I repeat that statement. Yes, in spite of the gentlemen who write to the papers and exclaim: "A childless marriage is like a house without windows." It is that sort of fool who makes the problem more difficult. He wants to muddle it with mere emotion.

I suppose it is agreed that certain people should not marry. We agree as to the iniquity of perpetuating taints.

IN PRAISE OF THE BORN MOTHER.

I also hold that certain other marriages should be childless. Some men and some women are more valuable to the community as pioneers than as parents. Some women are born to be mothers; there are other women who are certainly not. When one has studied the born mother—and seen her products—one is tempted to wish that the production of children could be assigned solely to such admirable women.

As for that other problem of the day, contraception as practised by the unmarried for the mere promiscuous gratification of sex—I consider it is a sin against self. It implies that abandonment of restraints which man must strive for or perish. It is a form of gluttony which will bring its own disillusionment. Those of us who are wise know that in too much eating and drinking there is no lasting joy. Even the wise smoker controls the weed. The very essence of happiness—the right happiness—lies in a delicate and sacred restraint. One may say to these young self-expressionists: "This is sin," and they will smile at you. Say to them: "This is mere foolish gluttony," and they may pause to think.

LETTERS.

Mr. Thomas's Scheme.

From Lord Kitchener of Khartoum.

To the Editor of the "Daily News."

Sir,—Mr. Thomas's scheme to relieve unemployment at the expense of the Colonies will fail. It cannot be run economically. It has already been tried, with disastrous results, in Kenya.

What our Colonies want is men, not money.

As a planter with some experience in Ireland, New Zealand, Jamaica and Kenya, let me assure Mr. Thomas to devote his talents to assist emigration, rather than burden the Colonies with debt. Yours faithfully,

KITCHENER OF KHARTOUM,
47, Horton-street, W.S.
July 30.

P.S.—Why is this million to be sent to the Colonies? The British Colonies and not the British Empire. Is it because the Government influence one, not the other?

The Egyptian Question.

Sir,—I have read with interest your comments on the prospect of an Anglo-Egyptian settlement, and your advice to the Egyptian Government not to miss the opportunity of reaching a settlement with the present Labour Government.

Allow me to assure you that the Egyptian Government is anxious to establish a friendly settlement with Great Britain as it is anxious to obtain the assistance of the British Government. This is a very proper attitude. The question is as vital to the Egyptian people as it is to any truly patriotic to be concluded with them. If the British Government could not afford to forego any of Britain's Imperial prerogatives by a treaty being negotiated behind its back, it is unreasonable for the Egyptian people to look with the utmost apprehension and mistrust at an attempt to negotiate a treaty, which is one of life and death to them—a time when their parliament is summoned.

Secretary-General of the W.M.F.,
1, Park-place, St. James, S.W.1,
July 28.

Powder Monkey's Husband.

Sir,—The complaint about the "game" of Powder-Monkey is timely. During the hot weather of last week my wife and I met the young man in a restaurant, was hailed by two youths with that insulting cry, "Powder-Monkey!" and we sat down in the cloak-room and remonstrated with them. One looked very sheepish, but the other brazenly said that it was only a game, and that it was time that the public should be made to understand the true complexion in public.

The influence of your paper may be of some use in putting a stop to this popular exhibition of bad manners.

Compelled by my wife's feelings I am compelled to ask you not to publish my name.

Yours faithfully,
"Bugs."

Miracles.

Sir,—Criticising Bishop Wollaton in the "Saturday Pictorial" Mr. Gifford writes: "I met the young man who deny the power of God." May I respectfully suggest that it is good not only to reject one's own "miraculous" records, but yet to believe in the infinite power of God? Y. W.

LONDON CALLING: By Max Murray.

The Submarine Disaster.

Putting The World Right.

IN the accompanying article on "The Way I Approach Life," W. Somerset Maugham, the author, tells Harold Albert that faith is the world's great need at present.

ALBERT.—This is an age, Mr. Deeping, when philosophers as philosophers are not popular. Novelists are supposed to be the religionists of the modern world, and to offer a scheme of life in a suitable coating of fictional jam, but how many of them really do possess a working creed? As the critics say, you seem to be one of the few novelists with a personal religion.

Deeping.—I've been fortunate, though. My father was a most religious man, not a prig, and he endeavoured to pass on his religion to me. I don't adhere to all of it nowadays, but it served as a good basis for my own philosophy. It taught me the importance of faith and that is most necessary. If there is anything wrong with the age we live in it is that a number of us cannot accept anything without proof. We have to go on seeking and seeking. A man putting a fly on the microscope in order to ascertain the actuality of what we all know exists—consciousness. It's absurd.

There's no doubt about it. We do need more faith.

Albert.—In what?

Deeping.—Naturally, in the unknown. In the idea, perhaps, that behind all the beauty and pity in the world there lies not chance but the cunning of a Great Artist.

A LITTLE LUCK.

Albert.—You believe, then, that all our lives are planned, mapped out beforehand, innately?

Deeping.—Not altogether. I think we are allowed a certain amount of rope. The canvas can be altered by the man himself with an eraser in one place



Peter Pan statue in Kensington Gardens.

and fresh strokes or overpainting in another. You are allowed to build up your own life in one way or another very much as you wish. Your own character or work can make or mar it.

Albert.—Luck, then, as you see it does not come into the shaping of the circumstances around oneself, or of one's career?

Deeping.—A little, perhaps, but not very much. It depends on one's own faculties in the long run. You may ask why one man should have the power to build up his own life and so to obtain happiness whilst another may seem to have all the ill-fortune in the world. That question I cannot answer. I do not attempt to. It's a problem which brings me back to the scientist.

One can want to learn too much. We human beings all live in a garden, and a very beautiful garden it is, too, at times, but there are walls encompassing us on all sides. Over these we cannot clamber. We must be content with what we have.

DANGER IN THE CLIQUE.

Albert.—You are an advocate of simplicity, in fact. I shouldn't be surprised if you were to tell me that you are afraid of mixing with a lot of people, that one can have too many friends.

Deeping.—If I have to mix with a lot of people for very long, I become irritated and say the rudest things. You're right there. It is so fatally easy

ABSURD EXHIBITION OF CASTE.

EDUCATION ANOMALIES IN LENZIE.

At their last meeting, Lanarkshire Education Authority decided with regard to South Lenzie children attending the primary department of Lenzie Academy, that the permits presently issued should not be withdrawn, but that in cases of children reaching school age no fresh permits should be granted, and that the children should be directed to attend Auchinloch School.

At a meeting of Cadder School Management Committee it was reported that in seven cases the parents had refused to send their children to Auchinloch.

Mr. Fleming said he entirely disagreed with the attitude of the Education Committee. They had taken drastic action in compelling Mollinsburn children to attend a school in the county, and he did not see why they should not deal with South Lenzie children in the same way.

They had 44 children from South Lenzie attending Lenzie Academy, which was in Dumfriesshire, and they had to pay Dumfriesshire £5 per pupil, as well as losing the grant of £4 10s per pupil, and the grant per teacher of £123 6s.

Mr. Briggs thought it was an absurd exhibition of caste on the part of the parents, and it was agreed to draw the attention of the Education Authority to the position.

BATHGATE INDUCTION.

The ordination of the Rev. R. Leonard Small, M.A., and his induction to the pastoral charge of St. John's Church, Bathgate, in succession to the Rev. John Lindsay, M.A., retired, took place yesterday.

At a social meeting in the evening the new minister was presented with pulpit robes, and Mrs. Small was made the recipient of a writing bureau and an electric standard lamp.

Peter Pan As Teacher.

—and for a literary man, especially—to get into a little literary clique and to stay there at the expense of his craft. Not that I'm unsociable.

I enjoy the company of other people. I cultivate the acquaintance of anyone, postman, gardener, or cottager. I believe, by the way, that it is fatal to put on side. You have to retain your humility and your sense of humour.

Albert.—And so you achieve happiness. I suppose that, in the long run, that is the be-all and end-all of every philosophy!

HAPPINESS.

Deeping.—Not necessarily. What is happiness, anyway? It is an elusive quality. Like the perfume of a flower, it bursts on you suddenly, deliciously; it intoxicates you; and then it is gone. It is a question of one's mental make-up.

Some people will always be gloomy and cheerless; others will always be smiling.

Similarly, some will like working, others will always loathe it. I personally, endeavour to combine the two. I believe in working hard and playing hard, and even in lazing hard. Lazing consciously, as you might say. You get out of life what you put into it.

Albert.—And that you mean, I take it, in more ways than one.

Deeping.—Oh, rather. If you treat people meanly, for instance, you will find them mean—because you discover your own mean self in them. If only all people knew themselves—understood their own mental make-up, there would be more contentment in the world. Self-pity and worry are very like diseases. If only they could be treated so, and cut out with the knife. If only we could understand as much about our brains as we do about our bodies.

A PURPOSE.

Albert.—Yes, that is the trouble. At twenty-one I find myself trying to make up my mind about my own mind. I think one thing, and then I think another. I experiment, and then retrace my steps.

Deeping.—Well, it's all worth while, isn't it? One has to experiment. It is the only way of finding out one's true self, or ascertaining one's own purpose.

There's the last and greatest factor. One should have a purpose, something worth while that one could attain. And having that purpose in the mind's eye, one should set oneself stoutly and passionately to possess it.

Albert.—A purpose, then, is the main-spring of your philosophy?

Deeping.—Roughly so. And for the rest, I have an eye to that figure in Kensington Gardens—Peter Pan. There's a lot to be learnt from that.

QUERIES ANSWERED.

Hard Hit, Whiteinch.—Apply to Sir John S. Samuel City Chambers, George Square.

Nemo, Argyll.—Communicate with Andrew Whyte & Son, Ltd., Bothwell Works, Easter Road, Edinburgh.

Jupiter (Greenock).—(1) It is not customary to give the intended mother-in-law a present. (2) The bridegroom always gives the best man a present.

J. McKay (Rutherglen).—There are certain restrictions regarding books being sent into this country from America, as for example, "Wells of Loneliness," which is prohibited although free of restriction to America.

Church (Greenock).—It is difficult to give an opinion on the market value of a picture without viewing same. If you care you may remove it from the frame and send it, with return postage, to William Ferris, 59 West Nile Street, Glasgow, who will give you his opinion.

Many Years Reader, Kirkcaldy.—The Civil List is allocated as follows:—Their Majesties, £110,000; salaries of Household, £125,000; expenses of Household, £125,000; works, £20,000; Royal Bounty, £12,500; unappropriated, £40,000, making a total of £475,000. The Duke of Connaught and the Duke of York receive £25,000 each, Princess Louise and Princess Beatrice receive £20,000 each, the daughters of the late King Edward receive £15,000 and the King's young children receive £5,000. The Prince of Wales receives no grant from the State.

SON CHARGED WITH MURDER

Alliston, Ontario, Thursday. A 50-year-old man, Wesley Campbell, who was found by the police in his home near here with freshly-inflicted wounds in his throat, thought to have been the result of an attempt to commit suicide, is now under arrest on a charge of murdering his father, William Campbell, a wealthy retired farmer, aged 85.

The elder Campbell was found dead in the cellar of his house by the police. He had apparently been dead for a week.—Reuter.



HOW fine a thing is a goodly chair to rouse him that is in dumps! With what a soft and easy sleight it sweetens and mollifies the temper! There's no higher merit a young wife can have than to keep her home wisely disposed and furnished. When at evening her husband feels older than Saturn, his paper filled with every kind of ominous portent, let her cease from twatting and casting in words and lead him to a Buoyant Chair. In its yielding embrace he will little by little remit his vehemence, obey the charm of it, and presently cast off all care. With every nerve soothed (every ounce of his weight supported on springs that are sprung on springs), he sees all things represented aptly and clearly, and indeed



finds nothing amiss. Then only will the thoughtful wife, as having been softly and delicately bred, speak to him of a curious fine hat she has spied in a certain shop.

Given without forfeiture or impeachment of modesty for

BUOYANT

EASY CHAIRS AND SETTEES

Most good Furnishing Houses sell Buoyant Chairs at prices from five guineas.

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Evening Students! Enrol for

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Hamilton Crescent School
Queen's Park School
John Street School
North Kelvinside School

What is a? RADIO-GRAM?

Just a turn of a switch and it is immediately changed from a powerful transmitter with electric motor to a super-sensitive all-weather radio receiver without motor! Chief features include: (1) In emergency electric receiver and powerful transmitter, all and one, with extra volume and extra power. Simply plug into the house current and it is a powerful transmitter. (2) In emergency electric receiver, simply plug into the house current and it is a super-sensitive all-weather radio receiver. (3) In emergency electric receiver, simply plug into the house current and it is a super-sensitive all-weather radio receiver. (4) In emergency electric receiver, simply plug into the house current and it is a super-sensitive all-weather radio receiver. (5) In emergency electric receiver, simply plug into the house current and it is a super-sensitive all-weather radio receiver. 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SETTING A TRAP FOR HAPPINESS.

August 26, 1929

ELUSIVE "BLUE BIRD" THAT CANNOT BE CAGED.

THE LAMP WITHIN.

What is the secret of happiness?

Several distinguished writers have been invited by "The Daily Chronicle" to give their opinions on what happiness is, and how it may possibly be found.

In the first of this interesting series, Mr. Warwick Deeping, the noted novelist, decides that while we set traps for happiness, it is "a bird that cannot be caged."

QUEST FOR VALLEY OF FELICITY.

HAPPINESS THAT SEEMS TO LIE "OVER THE HILLS."

By Warwick Deeping.

"I WANT to be happy."

So run the words of the song.

But what is happiness, and especially so in these days of rush and restlessness?

The Latins spoke of it as *felicitas* or *beatitas*—felicity, beatitude—and, just as these two words differ in the quality of the emotion they express, so we changeable, changing creatures differ in our ideas upon happiness.

But we may be rather vague in our ideas and slovenly in our concepts. We answer the question usually, because we have not set ourselves to confront the problem.

"Oh, happiness? Happiness is just happiness. Getting something you want, or doing something you want to do. Of course, I should be much happier if I had so-and-so."

HAPPINESS—HERE AND NOW.

That is the illusion. We are going to be happy to-morrow, because to-morrow we shall have something which we think we have not got. But happiness is here and now.

Happiness implies emotion, feeling. It is the perfume of the flower of our being, and if the flower of our being loses its beauty and its health, the perfume ceases.

So happiness is beauty and health, beauty in doing and feeling and thinking, for these things go together. It is breathing, and in heart beat, and a music, in the strength of our accomplishments, and in the richness of our thoughts. Happiness is there when we find that we "I" works well, and thinks well, and loves well.

"IF—"

We make the error of confusing the idea of happiness with other states. We try to attach happiness, which is an emotion and a universal to some material condition. We seek to impose upon matter.

We say: "If I could be rich I should be happy."

Or: "If I could be successful I should be happy."

Or: "If I could play cricket like Bobby I should be happy."

We invent imaginary conditions. We try to make a sort of fanciful glass vessel and pour happiness into it. In fumbling with the fragments of life we miss the whole.

Happiness is what we are, what our parents gave us, what we make of what we have. Father's life is beautiful or ugly.

Happiness might be called the light of the lamp of soul. If that light is dim we are in doubt and in distress. We chase this and that in the half darkness. We wander, we search, we complain. Life seems full of sunshine and shadows—a mockery, a delusion. We hear the cry: "Vanity, vanity; all is vanity."

It is strange how we are apt to think of happiness as a sort of quality attached to some particular thing which we must pursue and capture. We desire to possess a house or a person or a motor-car, or more money, or a hat.

We say: "If I had so-and-so I should be happy." We think that we can set a trap for happiness as for a bird, and



.....MR. WARWICK DEEPING.....

Is author of "Sorrell and Son" and about two score of other novels. He practised as a doctor for a year, and then "threw physic to the dogs" and adopted literature as a profession. His first novel, "Uther and Igraine," was published in 1904

that we can capture it, and clip its wings and put it in the cage of "I."

We shall possess it, and hang it up, and every day happiness will sing to us, but after a few days we may find that the bird has flown. It has escaped from the cage. Happiness cannot be caged.

It is emotion, also it is spirit. Seek it selfishly and it is not there. Seek life and love and beauty in thought and deed—and it is there. It is not a mere material object to be coveted, a mere product that when possessed commands joy.

VALLEY OF OUR DREAMS.

A man might say: "I am happy because I have a ton of coal in the cellar." What he means is: "I am happy because a fire will warm me."

The coal might be compared to the business of living, and if it burns aright we are warmed. Happiness is like that warmth.

To so many of us happiness is a thing of to-morrow. It is something that is not with us, but will be. We are like travellers displeased with the country we happen to be passing through, and assuring ourselves that the valley beyond the hills will be the valley of our dreams.

But it will not be, for we are not carrying to it the spirit which should be in ourselves. If we cannot find happiness in the eyes of to-day, we shall not find it in the eyes of to-morrow.

LABOURER'S "PHEASANT SHOOT."

I knew a labourer whose idea of happiness was to have £50 a year, no work to do, and that he should be the owner of a "pheasant shoot." This is true.

Consider the errors. He supposed that he could not be happy with his pick and shovel. In his quaint ignorance he thought that he could live and run a "pheasant shoot" on £50 a year. He imagined that he would be happy with no work to do. He imagined that happiness would come to him with a gun and cartridges, and that he would be happy killing things.

How quickly would he have shot away the wings of his illusion.

For if we are not capable of being happy with our pick and shovel we shall never be happy. If—somehow—we cannot find beauty in to-day, we shall not find it in to-morrow.

We can find it in the day's doing and thinking and feeling. If, somehow, we can bring beauty into a dull job and beauty into our feeling and into our thinking, the mystic glow is with us. We might exclaim, "How surprising! I feel happy, and yet nothing wonderful has happened."

BEAUTIFUL LIVING.

It doesn't. The happiness is there because good things are happening in us. We are not ugly within, but beautiful.

We have spoken kindly, we have loved, we have done the simple job simply and well, we have thought good thoughts. We have not had envy in us, or hatred, or discontent, or greed. We have not despised the thing we do, and so done it badly out of wilfulness and as a silly protest.

We have not gone about grumbling that life owes us this and that, and that we have not got it. Life owes us nothing; it just gives when we give.

For happiness is the secret of beautiful living, the beauty of good things done, of good words spoken, of patience and compassion, of a love that is not all for self.

It is a state, a glow within ourselves when the lamp burns as it should. And the light is in us, not over yonder, or in to-morrow.

Tomorrow: Is Religion Enough?
by John Oxenham.

Sunday Dispatch

London: Northcliffe House, E.C.4.
Central 6000.
Manchester: Northcliffe House, Blackfriars 8600.

AUGUST 20, 1939.

The Week

THE tempo of the new "Anvil Chorus" is being speeded up.

Get ready for a crescendo piece—with words and music by Professor Goebbels and his Rouserous Boys.

But don't let it frighten you; sound and fury break nothing. Hitler may say what he wants next Sunday at Tannenberg. He may say it on Saturday week at Nuremberg. He may say it tomorrow, or even today.

It doesn't matter much when he says it, if you don't get jumpy waiting for it. Because we already know what he wants.

He wants everything he can get away with. And he would much sooner fight a War of Nerves to get it than any other sort of war.

The War of Nerves was started a long time ago; and another big push is on.

That is why there are so many rumours clattering up the wires and so many people dashing about on this "mission" and that.

That is why there are frontier "incidents" and growling and howling in headlines to add to the confusion.

That is why there is enough charge and counter-charge flying about to measure with a Test Match dispute.

How far the newest big push succeeds is up to you.

Every time you get a headache worrying about it all counts as a casualty on our side.

Don't fret now. We have nothing to be smug about, but we are a lot stronger than we were, and are getting stronger every day.

Get On With It NOW!

If you have a tendency to get excited about things take a leaf out of the book of the Registrar-General.

The Registrar-General sees no reason to rush.

His department has half-done a useful job of work. All preparations have been made for compiling a badly needed National Register. The forms have been printed. Some 65,000 enumerators have been appointed. The machine is ready to turn over on a job that is going to take several months at any time. But the Registrar-General sees no reason to press the button until we get (a) a real emergency or (b) the census due in 1941.

He is taking the unnecessary risk that if he does need to press the button in a real emergency before 1941 his machine will have been scattered into many little parts.

Why take needless risks? This needs second (more practical) thoughts in Whitehall.

MEASURED by the most modern, and mechanical standards this England of ours is a ridiculous country.

According to the Totalitarians it has no discipline; it is old and decadent; it likes to play a game for the game's sake, and the loser and the winner are expected to shake hands.

It allows any man or woman to get up on a box and shout his or her opinions.

It possesses a police force that is the most incorruptible in the world.

It has no Gestapo, no concentration camps.

Its King can go about in public and mix with the crowd without being protected from his loving subjects by tanks and machine guns.

Our Prime Minister carries an umbrella. We do not have to enclose our more precious citizens in bullet-proof trains.

A most ridiculous country, complacent, soft, servile, garrulous.

We retain our Gable House. We may show our opinions, but we do not like being shouted at.

WE LET THEM

FOOL US

YES, we are incurably stupid.

We let other people fool us, perhaps because we still like to think that when a man makes a promise or signs a contract that promise or contract will be valid.

We do not pay sufficient attention to our highbrows, or wince when they pour scorn on us.

We are supposed to be quite incapable of making any sacrifice or of fighting for an ideal.

Even when we do, in our quiet way, begin to think of providing ourselves with a big stick, we are told by our dear friends that we are bluffering. Our young men haven't the guts for a fight.

Oh, haven't they! We don't throw bombs, or leave them about in suitcases.

We don't shoot our politicians or generals when they don't exactly please us.

We don't persuade our political opponents to commit suicide.

We do not spy upon each other, or get our own back upon a neighbour by whispering something nasty about his credo to the secret police.

We are somewhat humane—another symptom of softness and senility.

We are sentimental and hypocritical.

We do not kill unnecessary cruelty to animals.

England is a sort of dog's home, kept by Miss Britannia, a spectacled spinster.

We are accused of being the world's prigg, proud and busy-body. We ought to stay in our seats and let other nations bluffer when some blustering person kicks his smaller neighbour round the arena, and pulls ugly and threatening faces at us.

RIDICULOUS

—AND YET...

YES, we are ridiculous people, and yet—

We have colonised a great part of the globe, and instead of playing the heavy father we

have allowed our children to run their own show.

We have created a world-wide trade.

We have fought people and made friends with them.

We have lived through our too greedy phase and have educated ourselves into a feeling of human responsibility.

We have the first Navy in the world.

We look like having the first Air Force.

Nearly two million people have volunteered for National Service.

Our Territorial Force has doubled itself, and the men who are active in it tell me the physique and the spirit are admirable.

We have accepted another form of National Service which the Dretaries assured us we should never accept.

We believe in a certain kind of Freedom.

We believe in the sayings: "Live and let live."

But we like to be able to say "Go to hell" to people who try to interfere with us.

WILL OF THE

PEOPLE

DEMOCRACY—the slow, patient, and sometimes seemingly stupid will of the plain people.

We do not choose to be hurried.

We like to have our say, and not have our opinions crammed down our throats.

That body of opinion and of kindly, moral sense which emanates from the plain people may be slow, but it has wisdom and sense. It is a kind of universal and right feeling about things. It strengthens and satisfies.

For one, would rather trust that feeling than the vapourings of the too-consciously clever.

Cleverness may be such a pose. It likes to call us damned fools, and feel superior and important.

But I am convinced that this slow, sure, gradual, right feeling about things, this kindly, practical, plain wisdom, gives us a strength that is more formidable than the drugged dis-

Says

WARWICK DEEPING

the famous author, who points out that whatever else they may have done, the Dictators have at least made

ENGLAND WAKE UP



cipline of the Dictator countries.

We have not been blustering and shouting and sweating and striking attitudes for the last five years.

We have not been propagandised to the edge of perdition.

We have not been overstrained.

We have not been singing at the tops of our voices and gone hoarse.

We are only just getting into our stride.

We are fresh.

We can laugh and joke.

We are, in the main, a quiet, peace-loving people, a people that does not panic. (I omit a part of our intelligentsia and a section of the middle classes.)

The English still remind me of Jack, my father's old bull terrier, the sweetest tempered beast on earth. But on one or two rare occasions when a bully-dog growled at my father or threatened Jack's small friend, John went in like thunder, laid out the aggressor, and came back smiling all over his face.

IN DEBT TO

DICTATORS

PERSONALLY, I think this absurd country of ours is in the debt of the Dictators.

They have done us an immense service, unintentionally. I think we had grown a little sleepy and self-satisfied, and our Totalitarian friends, in kicking us, were administering a stimulus that was needed. And the results may be not to their liking.

The senile old gentleman whom they kicked is turning out to be a very vigorous young fellow, and he has gone into training. Prague made history in a way that Hitler did not intend.

But that is not the end of the story.

We are arming.

We mean to be strong. We mean to be dangerous people to quarrel with.

We intend that international thuggery shall be bad business. But when that arming is complete, we have to go further.

REARMAMENT

—AND THEN...

THESE crises, this awakening has revealed

We know, or should know, what, as a great community, we can do.

We are more conscious of our familyship.

When we have rearmed,

there are other problems to attack. We have our own black spots, unemployment, the land, the aged poor, village water-supplies, roads, public health.

We are not going to end with rearmament.

I hope we have learnt our lesson.

We, as a community, must set out to do the big things, that are waiting to be done, and we know now that they can be done. We must do them together, like the lads in the Militia, regardless of class.

Who doubts our power to do them?

This England of ours is worth while. I, for one, would like to

A LITTLE MILD

JINGOISM

FINALLY, we have in our vocabulary two words beginning with J, one recent, one more antique—Jitters and Jingoism.

The superior people rejoice severely for introducing Jingoism; we must not even think of a thimbleful of that near drink.

But it has been my experience that though the superior people tilt their noses at us as we swagger ever so little less as peculiarly liable to drink deep of Jitters.

I would prescribe a little mild Jingoism, and cut out the Jitters.

YESTERDAY'S RECORD-BREAKER

ANSWERS HIS CRITICS

By SIR MALCOLM CAMPBELL

WHY DO IT

TECHNICAL people in marine, aviation, and motor engineering understand the importance of speed records.

Pilots of fast planes, drivers of racing cars, know the strong personal urge that drives me on.

But many people whose work and interests are in other fields are not so keenly interested. "Why on earth do you want to travel on the water at more than 100 m.p.h.?"

"Why did you build Bluebird in an attempt to beat your own record of 130.9 m.p.h.?"

"Haven't you had enough?"

Let me try to give the answers.

Speed is the secret of much of our personal and commercial lives.

but much more so is it vital in our national defence, sea, air, and land defence.

And, however, complacent we may affect to be about our big ships, our position with so-called mosquito craft—motor torpedo-boats—is not too cheerful.

Our motor torpedo-boats are not so fast as those used by some foreign governments.

The Italians, for instance, consistently set new kinds of records depending on the internal combustion engine, have craft capable of 33 knots.

The value of such boats for depth-charge laying and machine-gunning, as well as for lightning torpedo attacks, will be very high in any kind of marine warfare. We dare not neglect them.

Speed records and racing provide the lessons in construction that make possible the fast, safe, and reliable work-a-day vehicle.

For little more than £100 you can buy today cars which will do a mile a minute, and which for acceleration, road-holding, braking, and steering are infinitely better than costly models of only a decade ago.

Racing and record attempts have speeded research enormously in the construction of aeroplane and automobile.



Sir Malcolm Campbell

develops 2,000 horse power in the car, 2,400 h.p. in a car, and 2,600 h.p. in a boat. The reductions are due to different pressures in the air intake.

My new hull offers 32 per cent less resistance to water than the old craft—motor torpedo-boats—is not too cheerful.

I hope so, but I could not tell you this is not a stunt. We are doing it in an incalculable unknown, and must go slowly, by trial and error.

N. expert could tell us whether we would happen, with new conditions at higher speeds on water.

Would the craft be stable? I know that 140 m.p.h. on water seemed faster than 200 m.p.h. on land.

My staff and I agree that there must be something in water speed in land, because there is no known about it. Scope is unlimited.

There is nothing I love better than the joy of achievement. Motorists interested in it. So did aviation hunting. Now it is water—the great unknown.



One copy.

The Cult of the Early Potato.

Genui has been defined as the art of taking infinite pains, but it can also be described as a hyperbolic appreciation of the obvious.

Genui is for the plain potato!

What is the association, if any?

Now, I think that everyone will admit that we can suffer from a plethora of potatoes, marked, banded, baked, especially the marked variety, partly flavoured with fat. Our fondness for the potato in its youth, regard to that particular sweet flavour, is repeated after a winter of tough green & woolly spuds, manikins.

Dear Potatoes are we!

Alas, it is as welcome as the May flower & the cuckoo call.

Well, what of early Early Potatoes? I was not inspired by Genui, but by a passion for early spuds. What flock of Genui there was in it may be described as an appreciation of the obvious. It is really very extraordinary how people get into grooves. No imaginative greed appears to inspire them. The process is as regular as eating pie, if you can get pie that is eatable. When we had evolved our system people visiting the garden would express astonishment.

"Why, I have never seen this class before"

"I have never thought of that."

The title of the thing might be - "How to Have Dear Potatoes for Light Buds", yes, & we are well ahead of the market.

Phase! The business begins in January. Seed is set to sprout in some front porch place, either on empty room. The rest are

arranged in shallow trays - in the light. They should be placed on end.

Phase Two. We have a cold first-house, but my glass house will serve. Sage pots or boxes are filled $\frac{1}{3}$ with leaf-mould or rotted compost over drainage-cocks. Add a little loam, plant your potatoes a row with manure loam. Do this about the middle of February. When the shoots push through, add more loam or garden soil. Do not water the seeds. If there is frost, cover the pots or boxes with some old sacks. These earlies are ready by May, at or no. It may seem late now, for the tubers will be small, but - oh Boy - aren't they sweet & welcome.

Phase Three. ~~Plant at the end of February.~~ We turn to the garden frame. The soil should have had a dressing of old dung or compost. Inbuds are planted in the frame at the end of February, & the lights are covered ~~if they are~~ of hard frost. Beware of fresh lime for potatoes. It is apt to make them healthy. When the haulm reaches the lights they may be tilted during the day, if there is no frost. When the lights are closed & there are night frosts, it is as well to cover the glass, or the foliage pressing against it may be scorched. When the haulm gets very big we rig up stakes & matting covers, if necessary. These frames earlier can be dry about the end of the third week in May.

There is no need to earth up.

Phase Four. The seed is planted in drills under Chace Barn clover. In the case earthing up may be done, & the clover covered if there is hard frost. The same applies when the foliage is against the glass. Be careful that the clovered potatoes are only a little

later than there in France.

You may have trouble in an abnormal spring, as we had this year. The warm March & April brought the potatoes in with a rush, & they were so craggy & dry under the cloche that we had to remove the cloche, & sprinkle. I don't come there any more, & I was caught out right. So now the potatoes have had to crowd the cloche back a little, & cover.

But we have another way, with a rather like giant pea-guards. I have placed over the row & covered at night.

If the plants may be partly blackened, but do not die. If the stem and roots are alive, the plants will recover. Your crop will be a little later.

Normally you should dig at the end of May.

Phoebe June

Earlier in the year in the normal way. With your eyes under glass you need not hurry there in & take a chance & a very sheltered report. Be ready to catch up if the fog is thick & there are further about.

These potatoes can be dug towards the end of June.

Even the late crop ^{was} planted slightly later this year, but it ~~they~~ recovered well.

Now as to the Beech. We have found Eclipse the most satisfactory early, better than Queen Pilot. The old Duke of York crops well, but ^{it} is apt to be watery & tasteless.

If you have bonfire & wood-ash, keep the ash dry & draw the soil with it. Potatoes like potash. We have used all our ash. Most gardeners will leave it out in the row, & the potato is washed out.

Gardening is very much like life, & the farmer who is getting new ideas, & trying them out, is a very humble. In a garden you will always find plenty of trouble, but the Earth does not make blackness the subject. It has always astonished me how few professional gardeners - no collector have any enthusiasm or interest. They do not welcome adventure, & the enthusiastic amateur or gardener's adventure.

Yet, Nature will play you tricks, & many of your experiments will not produce results, but those that do make it right with you. Even our gardeners teach us something. Many a plant has had the laugh of me, & perhaps some very low species growing in gravel, & growing more luxuriantly than some of the proposed plants.

But the Earth Potato is an amiable creature, if you take trouble, & a really good one with that trouble.

For me the optimum rather than the pursuit in a garden.

to much Dying